No.74 MAR/APR '18 £6

# Little White Lies

TRUTH & MOVIES

一

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO MAN'S BEST FRIEND?

犬だってそうだと同じ

# ISLE OF DOGS

*Directed by* **WES ANDERSON**
*Starring* **BRYAN CRANSTON, KOYU RANKIN, GRETA GERWIG**
*Released* **30 MARCH**

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**A humongous creative undertaking combined with a simple love of dogs results in one of the most staggering achievements of Wes Anderson's career.**

A small bronze statue of an Akita stands at one of the five entrances to Shibuya Station in Tokyo, serving as a popular meeting place and point of interest for the thousands of visitors who pass through each week. This particular Akita, who is immortalised in precious metal, has a name and a history – Hachikō, the dog who patiently waited nine years on this very spot for a master who would never return. He may have passed away some 80 years ago, but the tale of the dog who waited continues to enchant and inspire folk the world over. In his new film *Isle of Dogs*, it seems that Wes Anderson has spun a similarly wistful yarn about about the strangely transcendent power of canine companionship.

Anderson likes to frame his films as tall tales, placing viewers at a gentle remove from reality to a plane of existence more fantastic and charmed than our own. His latest is no exception, a fastidious visual ballad prefaced by an exquisitely-detailed prologue that provides some quick but necessary exposition, reminiscent of the breathtaking, 'meet the family' opening to his 2001 commercial breakthrough, *The Royal Tenenbaums*. The mythology of *Isle of Dogs* informs of the cat-loving (evil) Kobayashi dynasty and a mysterious outbreak of 'snout fever' which threatens the population (both canine and human) of retro-futurist urban prefecture, Megasaki. The solution presented by no-nonsense Mayor Kobayashi is to banish every dog to a floating, off-shore garbage dump named Trash Island. This reactionary decree does not go down well with his young ward, Atari, who promptly sets off to retrieve his pet dog Spots from exile – and in doing so, happens upon a rag-tag pack of self-styled alpha dogs.

Many of Anderson's familiar wreckin' crew lend their distinctive voices to these pups, including Edward Norton (Rex), Jeff Goldblum (Duke), Bill Murray (Boss) and Bob Balaban (King). It's fitting, then, that Bryan Cranston plays the outsider among the outsiders, his gravelly voice bringing a soft edge of menace to stray mutt Chief, who is quick to warn those he meets: "I bite". The dulcet tones of Courtney B Vance lends a pleasant gravitas to the film's narration, but arguably the most fun comes with Tilda Swinton's typically eccentric side-character. To describe her would be to spoil one of the film's most charming surprises, but her inclusion is indicative of the thought that has gone into every tiny element of the film. With Anderson, nothing is left to chance – every breed comes with a backstory, just as every strand of fur is meticulously matted to enhance the film's exquisitely scuzzy aesthetic.

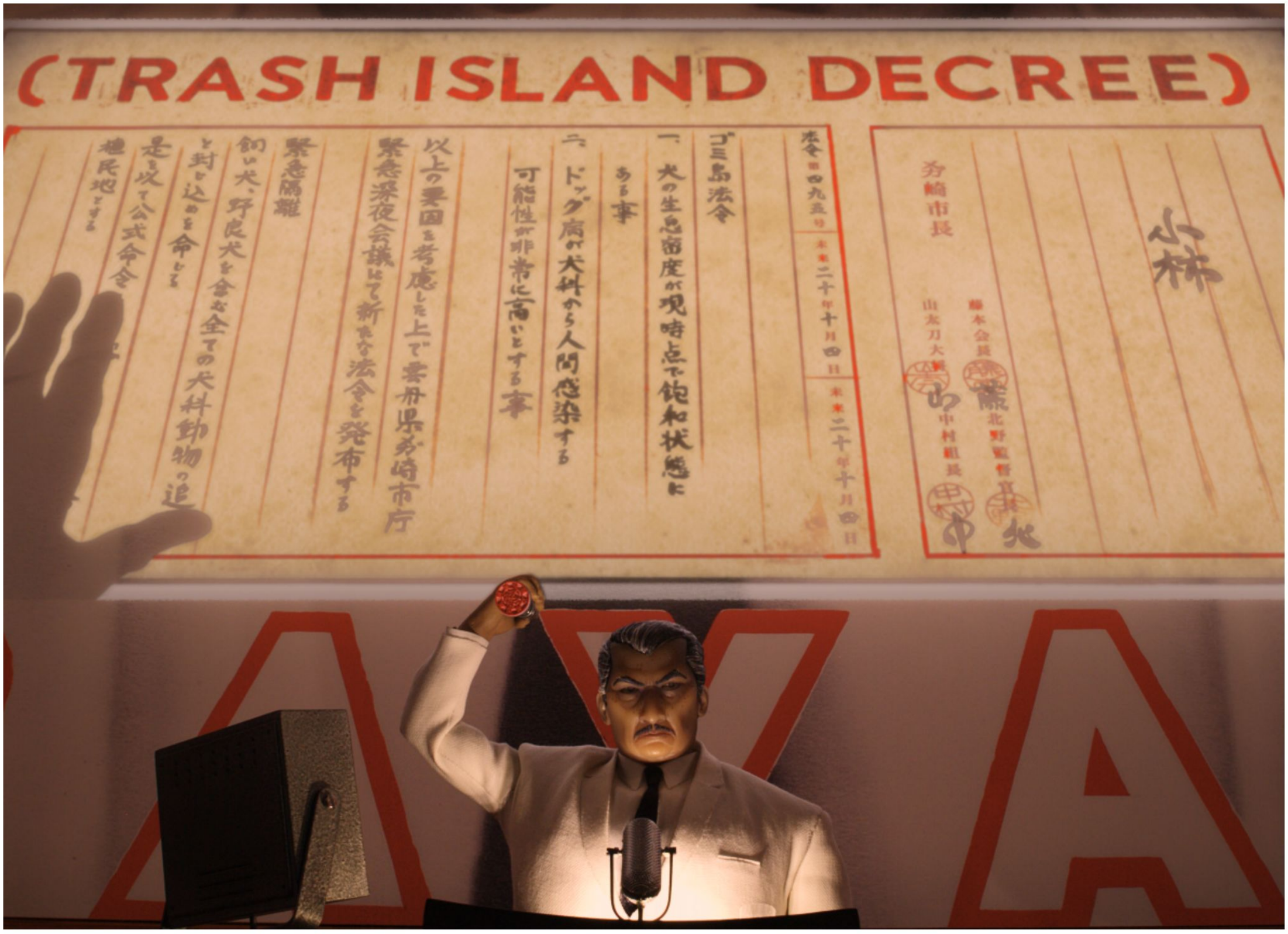
There's so much pleasure in the ambitious production design too, from the exquisite puppets and sequences influenced by traditional shadow play to animation inspired by Japanese woodblocks and Alexandre

**In contrast to 2009's *Fantastic Mr Fox*, which blurred the line between human and animal, the dogs here are very much wild things.**

Desplat's striking, non-orchestral score, which is fully in tune with the film's setting. In a bold contrast from his previous work, Anderson only places a single '60s pop song into the mix, The West Coast Pop Art Experimental Band's 'I Won't Hurt You', whose sombre strains add to the film's melancholic undertow.

In its design, Megasaki itself inhabits both past and future – it is a audacious study in Japanese futurism, and it's easy to spot the influence of Hayao Miyazaki and Akira Kurosawa in the elaborate graphic animation sequences and the use of a soulful guitar melody borrowed from the latter's 1948 noir feature, *Drunken Angel*. Rather than feeling derivative, *Isle of Dogs* feels like an impassioned and sincere response to the work of these master filmmakers – what a treat it is to feel a director's regard for his influencers so acutely, and to feel that Anderson has worked hard to ensure the product he has created feels authentic and respectful. This is most evident in his decision to have Japanese characters speak in their native tongue, with swaths of dialogue going untranslated (as explained in a handy opening title-card). It's a fascinating choice that means the film will be viewed entirely differently by Japanese speakers. Also, there's being a playful sense of irony that comes from watching a film where you comprehend the dogs more than you do the human characters.

In contrast with 2009's *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, which blurs the line between animal and human, the dogs here are very much wild things, and the narrative is told largely from their perspective. Beyond a vague familial




tradition, we never learn what it is that motivates Kobayashi's hatred of dogs – because it doesn't matter. After all, why should the reasoning of humans matter to dogs? Their chief concerns and motivations remain pleasantly animalistic – a warm bed, an attentive master and a plentiful supply of food.

As he did with the young, runaway lovers at the centre of 2012's *Moonrise Kingdom*, Anderson indulges the unique perspective of his protagonists. While it's a risk to centre a film so completely on characters who have such animal motives, it's thrilling to see Anderson commit so completely to the world he has created – he trusts his audience, both young and old, to follow suit. It's a deceptively simple story – like a lovingly crafted and hand-painted matryoshka doll, with each new lacquered layer a delight to unpack and behold. The narrative scampers playfully between Trash Island and Megasaki, like a dog attempting to follow two different scent trails, bounding with wide-eyed excitement when the paths finally converge.

This is also one of Anderson's most surprisingly sedate films. It lacks the whirling hijinks of 2014's *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, and is perhaps most reminiscent of his early work in 1998's *Rushmore*, down to its wry wit and a soulfulness that sticks long after the end credits have rolled. Yet it possesses the heart of a mighty beast. This love story is about the purest relationship that exists in the known world: that between a 12-year-old boy and his dog. In every one of his films, this singular director has demonstrated a deep capacity for human empathy, and it's this element that comes across with the most force in *Isle of Dogs*. A sense of understanding and admiration between human and canine that sinks into each immaculate frame. There's some melancholy, too. For the love of a dog – unconditional though it may be – is only a fleeting gift, and it's this heartbreaking detail which elevates the film beyond a simple (and simplistic) animal caper. It's soulful, reflective poetry that's etched on celluloid, and plays dividends by viewing on the biggest screen possible. It also invites (demands?) repeat viewings, so that like a dog proudly digging up the backyard in search of a juicy bone, you too might uncover something new each and every time. **HANNAH WOODHEAD**

**ANTICIPATION.** *More Wes stop-motion sounds like a dream... if he can do justice to the setting.* **4**

**ENJOYMENT.** *Surprisingly different from anything Anderson has done before. In a very good way.* **5**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *Visually stunning, emotionally arresting, dog-gone brilliant.* **5**

JOAQUIN PHOENIX

# "TAXI DRIVER FOR A NEW CENTURY"
THE TIMES

## "STUNNING"
THE INDEPENDENT

★★★★★
LITTLE WHITE LIES

★★★★★
THE TELEGRAPH

★★★★★
THE LIST

★★★★★
SCREEN

## "A MASTERPIECE"
THE LIST

★★★★★
THE TIMES

★★★★★
HEYUGUYS

★★★★★
THE SKINNY

★★★★★
IRISH TIMES

A
LYNNE RAMSAY
FILM

# YOU WERE NEVER REALLY HERE

WHY NOT PRODUCTIONS · BFI Film Forever LOTTERY FUNDED · FILM4 · STUDIOCANALUK · YouWereNeverReallyHere.co.uk · amazonstudios · STUDIOCANAL · 15 STRONG VIOLENCE, INJURY DETAIL, CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE THEME, LANGUAGE

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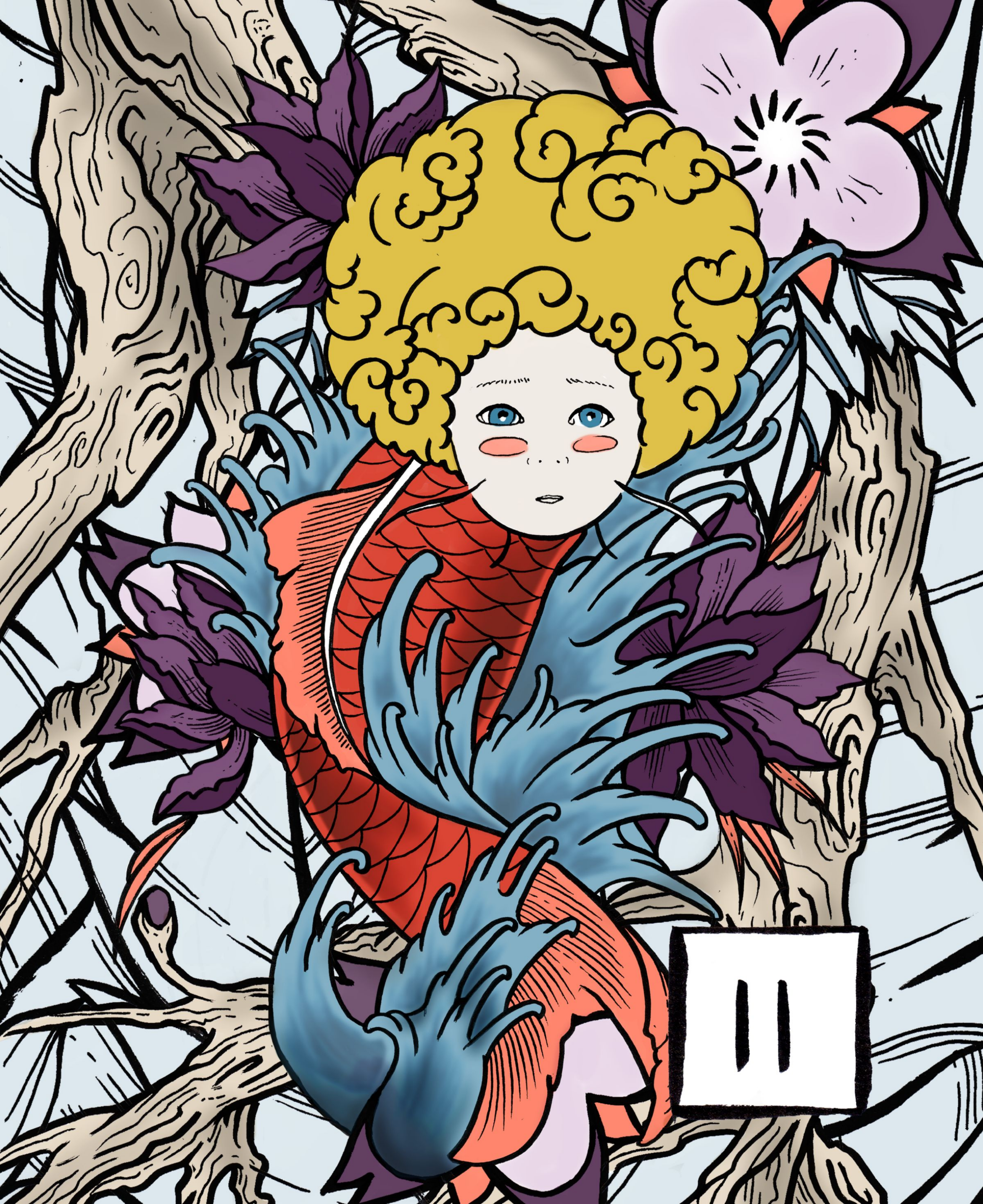
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THE ISLE OF DOGS ISSUE

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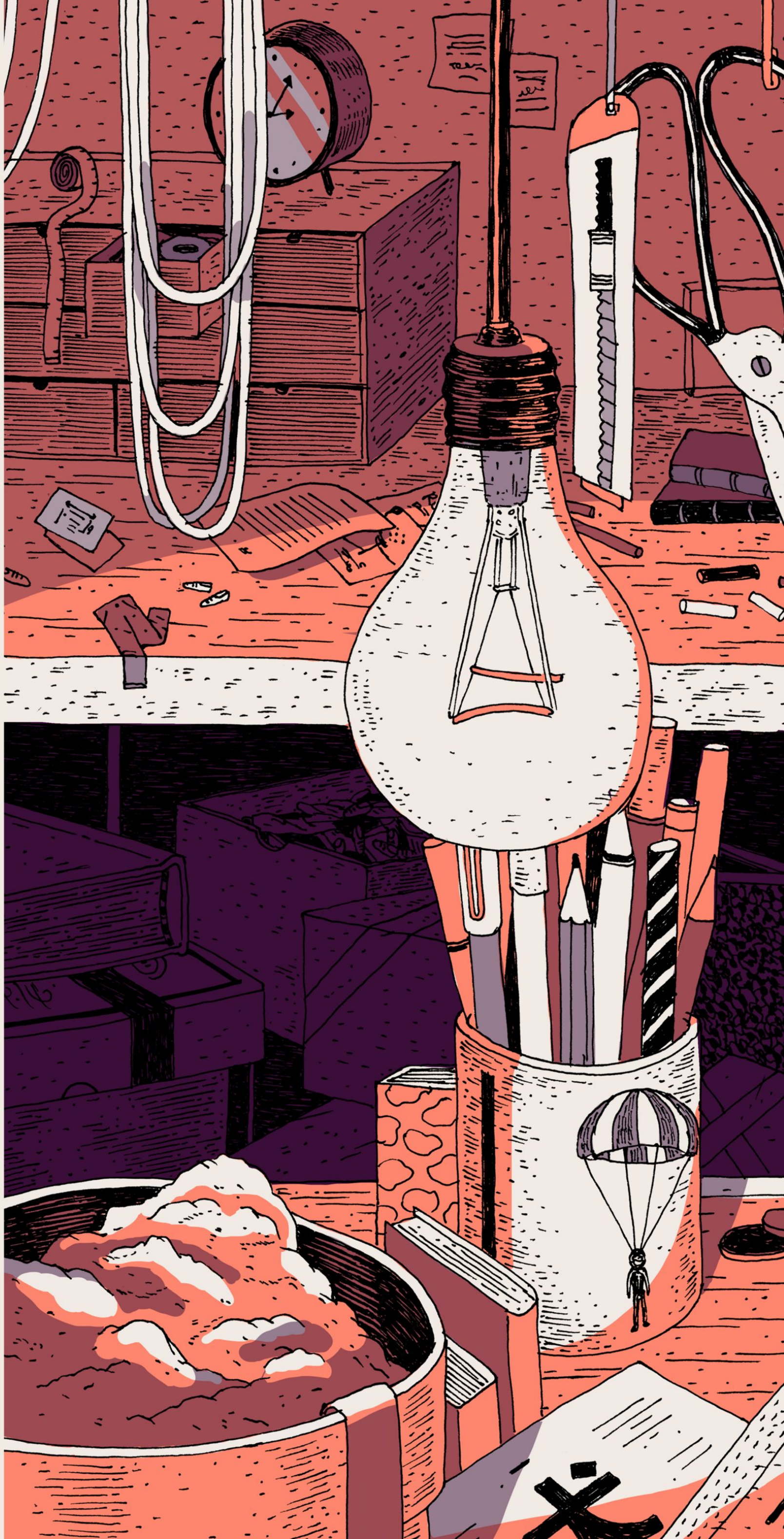
LAURÈNE BOGLIO

# WE'RE MOVING TO THE CASTLE

INTERVIEW
— BY —
SOPHIE
MONKS KAUFMANN



M T W T F S S

Is there a pleasure quite like listening to the soothing and amiable voice of Wes Anderson as he turns his mind towards answering questions on his own carefully-calibrated terms? The focus of this conversation with the master director is *Isle of Dogs*, a language-obsessed, political conspiracy-themed, stop-motion adventure concerning dogs exiled to a trash island in a near-future Japan.

Midway through our chat, the line goes dead. Some painful moments pass. When we are back in touch, Wes reveals that he is on a train passing through Switzerland and just went through a tunnel. Unable to contain myself, I say, "Are you trying to act like a character in your film, it's perfect?" He indulges me with a little laugh before explaining: "No I have to. I'm on my way to Berlin. We're on our way to the film festival and I'm going from Paris so it's just by chance." This unassuming nature, spelling out his reason for heading to Berlin in case I may not be aware that *Isle of Dogs* is opening one of the world's biggest film festivals, is in evidence throughout our conversation.

In addition, we also spoke to Anderson's co-conspirators on the film, Roman Coppola and Jason Schwartzman, who have chimed in with their own thoughts on what it's like to work with this one-of-a-kind artist.

**LWLies: With previous films you began by immersing yourself in influences. Where did *Isle of Dogs* begin?**

Anderson: I did one animated movie years ago [*Fantastic Mr Fox*, 2009] and I had the thought that I would like to do another one at some point. I had the idea of this story of these alpha dog characters and setting of this garbage dump. It sounds like a very odd thing to have waiting in the wings: a pack of dogs who lived on a garbage dump, but that was what I had. And then I started talking with Jason [Schwartzman] and Roman [Coppola] about it. We had also talked about doing something in Japan or with a Japanese setting and we combined them together. The story really could have been set anywhere but our big inspiration with the movie was to make it about what we loved in Japanese cinema and it grew into something more to do with all kinds of Japanese culture and our enthusiasm for it.

**Have you any clue what this original image of dogs on a trash island is rooted in?**

I think of things I liked when I was a kid. I loved Oscar the Grouch on *Sesame Street*. I loved this TV show they had in America called *Sad Albert* where they had a clubhouse on a garbage dump. I always loved this TV show called *Sanford and Son* about this junk dealer in America. That setting always interested me: garbage. So maybe it comes out of that, maybe it's a childhood thing, but really in terms of where the idea comes from really I have no idea.

**Kunichi Nomura helped with the story. He's not part of your usual gang. How did you find him and what did he bring?**

Kun is a very old friend of mine and Roman's and, as soon as we started working on the script, I wrote to Kun and said: 'You know, Kun, we may need some help.' I didn't even tell him what it was. Jason, Roman and I were working on it first. I then started asking Kun for more and more information and before long he became one of our key collaborators. Not just on the story, on keeping us inspired with ideas and also helping us figure out what is right in Japan. Also he helped us cast the movie because quite a lot of the film is in Japanese and the actors are Japanese. Kun helped us figure out who we ought to have in certain parts and how to get them and he also helped me direct. Everything in Japanese was a co-effort of ours. And he translated quite a bit, and re-translated and refined the translations. Kun is actually in *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. He's a guest in this hotel and that's because he's an old friend. He came to visit us and be in the movie.

**So you must trust him entirely because... I don't want to assume, but do you speak Japanese?**

Me?

**Yes.**

No. Lord no.

**Lord no!**

I can't speak any Japanese. So yes, we were very dependent on Kun. There's a lot of text that's in Japanese in the movie and we have other collaborators who helped in that way. Certainly in the performances of the actors who speak Japanese, Kun was the one I depended on.

**The love of language present in all your films is pushed further in *Isle of Dogs* because you have this translation motif.**

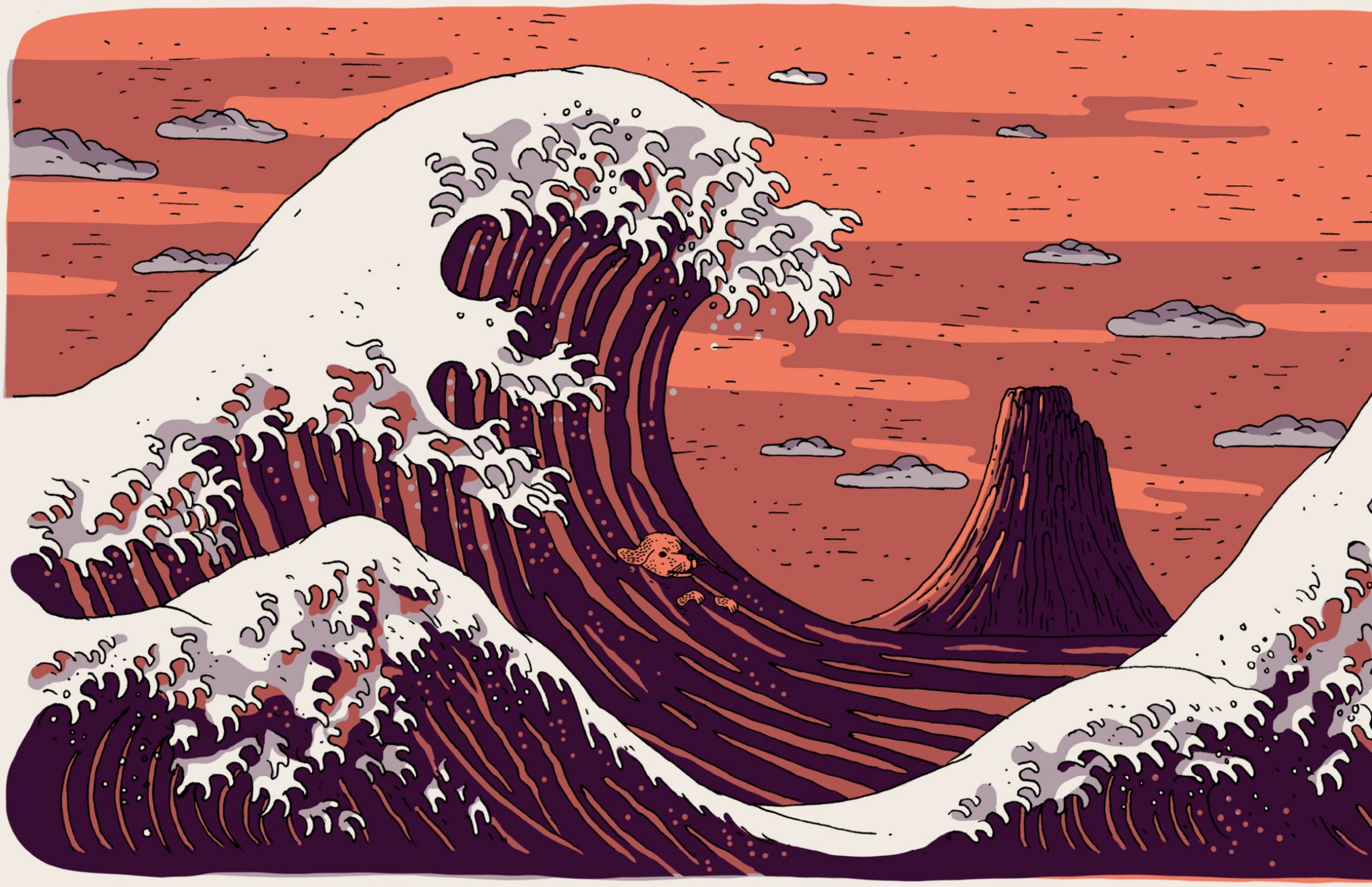
The movie isn't just in English or Japanese, it's translation crazy. It has every different possible way of translating. I like keeping both languages alive. Obviously, in different countries English will be erased. The Japanese stays everywhere that people will see the movie but the English will be replaced with French, Italian, etc.

I thought it would be exciting to do it that way. Part of the thing of making a movie is what you learn from your research – what you discover – that you can then share. You end up changed when it's all done because you had this experience with something new. I wanted language to play a role without it becoming an obstacle. You can simply subtitle it but instead we tried all kinds of different words and also let the Japanese speak for itself. You don't

## A NOTE FROM JASON SCHWARTZMAN

# A ONE STAR FIRST IMPRESSION

"My first impression of Wes when I met him was... Honestly, it had to do with he had on Converse sandals. I had never seen those before. I had never been to an audition before either. I was so nervous and I really didn't know what to expect sitting alone in that waiting room with all these professional actors with their parents. What is on the other side of that door? Who is the person gonna be? I didn't know what Wes looked like or anything. So, when the door opened, I remember thinking, 'He's young. He looks like someone I could be friends with,' even though I was 10 years younger, but I guess it was a good first start for the character. And these sandals, I'd never seen these sandals before. In fact I was wearing these lime-green New Balance with red reflector ends, and he was like, 'Woah I've never seen these...' so we talked for five minutes about our shoes and then we started talking about music. The way to describe it is that it was instantly depressurised. It just felt so natural to be with him. It was really just: he's young, he's got these sandals.... I was expecting a whole different thing. I know it sounds like a joke, the sandals, but it's really true. The fact that he was wearing these Converse sandals, these One Star sandals made me feel like, 'This is going to be okay today'. Even if it's a terrible audition this is going to be okay. In all, it does show that you can't judge a book by its cover but, sometimes, if the cover is wearing sandals it does make you less intimidated to read the book."



## A NOTE FROM ROMAN COPPOLA

# SHIPPING UP TO THE LIFE AQUATIC

"Wes had a period where he lived in LA briefly and we got to know each other a little bit, just as friends. The real point where I became more of a collaborator was during *The Life Aquatic*. I had done second unit, meaning directing additional photography for projects, with friends and family so I said, 'Oh if you ever need a little help just call on me.' He had never really worked in that way and was a little sceptical but I ended up coming to Italy, just because I was there. I just sort of showed up on the set and ended up saying, 'Well let me just help with this a little bit,' or, 'I can go take this camera and go shoot a boat in the harbour'. Slowly we became collaborators where I ended up helping out a bit as an additional ally and colleague and all-around helper. That graduated into other things. The most significant step was working with Jason and he on *The Darjeeling Limited* as a producer and a co-writer and then we did *Moonrise Kingdom* together as co-writers and on and on."

necessarily know what people are saying a certain amount of the time, but you sort of get it.

**I was interested that you feel changed by each movie because there's an idea that people just stay the same.**

I don't want to exaggerate the amount that I might change because every time I make a movie, as much as I think I'm doing something completely different to what I've done before, the first reaction I always get is people saying, 'Well I could tell immediately that that was one of yours.' It's almost like, 'I've heard this record before,' even if I feel like I've changed everything. But when you make a movie, you get deeply interested in the subject. To me, the most motivated I am to learn something is when I've got a movie to work on about it. I just feel like that engages me more with studying than anything else does. But I can't say it changes me. I have new things to work with that I didn't have before.

**It adds to your knowledge or experience?**

Yeah, exactly.

**I think what links your films is a distinctive tone which balances melancholy and humour and dynamism. Are you consciously creating this tone?**

I don't think that I focus on the tone. In the writing, it's all about what happens next. Once we have our characters and we know where they live or what their world is, which is usually something that's there early, then it's about *this* happens. And then what follows *that* and then what follows *that* and where it's going to lead them. Then, when you're into the next scene, it's just, 'What is going to make it interesting?' and, 'What is going to surprise me?' when we're writing it and at any other phase of the thing.

So I think I kind of just trust myself that it's all going to kind of fit together and I don't know that it always necessarily does. I always go one shot at a time and one moment at a time and try to bring the most to it. Sometimes this means rewriting and reworking to find something that's got more electricity to it. Sometimes it's research and searching for ideas for what to make it do visually, or what can happen in the blocking of it, or the shooting of the thing. I don't know if that answers your question but it's almost like I don't know the answer to the question.

**It sounds like you trust your instincts. Is that true?**

Maybe it's true. I would be reluctant to say yes because, way at the top of it, I'm usually second-guessing them. But on some level, eventually, I don't have much choice.

**To trust yourself at all sounds amazing.**

Not everybody would probably think it's a great idea to do this garbage dump dog movie half in Japanese. I'm somehow trusting some kind of impulse or idea about that, but in the case of this movie, the more we developed it, the more it went along, the more I felt like a story was taking a shape that I felt like I, as an audience member, might respond to. So maybe that's my best point of reference: what might work for me, if I was sitting in the theatre and not behind the camera.

**You hold in mind two points-of-view: one of someone in the middle of it all and one of someone watching?**

Sometimes I feel like one, sometimes I feel like the other, but yeah, that's probably a normal thing. I bet most people who work on movies have a bit of each.

**How do you personally navigate an increased level of public recognition?**

I don't really feel like there's much of any time when I have to really think that way. We've been working on this movie for like three years and it's been very time-consuming and also very fun. There isn't any time along the way when it really mattered to me whether or not the last movie I did was better known than the one before or anything like that. It's really just doing the same thing I've been doing for years, just on a new story.

**Would you be tempted to pull a JD Salinger and retreat from public life, or are you happy to be public-facing?**

Well, you know, I have other movies that I want to do after this one so I'm not very distracted by any suggestion of something I ought to do instead, only because I already have something that I think might be interesting. I would try to be open to ideas that someone might bring my way. At the same time my first priority is usually what's the thing that I already know I want to do and how do I get that done.

**Something like this, talking to a journalist, how is that for you?**

## A NOTE FROM ROMAN COPPOLA

## TUNING INTO RADIO WES

"Wes is the filmmaker so as writers we're in service of him as he's trying to find this target. He has something in his mind's eye that is the right thing and we're there to help him find that. Wes likes to, as we go about our day, eat interesting food, see interesting things in museums. There's always a seeking of stimulating things. So we'll talk and we'll have experiences or watch a movie or read a passage from a book or just something that is in the spirit of what we're doing. It may not be direct research but it shares the mood. We'll spot something and it'll spark a discussion and when something really smells right and is part of the film based on Wes's instinct then it gets put down in a notebook that Wes keeps. He's always memorialising things that feel right. Jason and I are always trying to tune our antennas to the same wavelength to help find the thing together, but when it's written Wes puts the pen to the paper to make a note, or to start to lay out the details."

It's alright. It can be fun to have a conversation like this and hear what you're interested in. I think it helps to share a bit about what I have in mind – I don't know if it helps or not – but it's a tradition anyway. When you have a movie coming out, you go and talk about it a bit. I always used to read before a movie would come out. I was always interested in learning all about it so it's a natural part of it, I guess.

**You feel like things have gone full circle and you can give movie fans pleasure by having access to you.**

Yeah, yeah, that's right.

"NOT EVERYBODY WOULD PROBABLY THINK IT'S A GREAT IDEA TO DO THIS GARBAGE DUMP DOG MOVIE HALF IN JAPANESE."

**When you're at this stage where you have the germ of an idea, do you have certain rituals to bring it to the fore?**

Sometimes things that I'm working on might have had little seeds that go back five years or 10 years even, some little aspects of it. The last movie I did it was definitely at least eight years or so from when I first started taking notes and thinking about it. I don't have rituals, but sometimes it's a long process that happens while other things are going on. Then I also have a great thing which is I have collaborators, some of whom I've worked with for years and years. I can share what I've been working on with them. Sometimes they help and sometimes they just remind you how you did it before, how long it took you to do some aspects of a movie, or what I'm like even during a process so I can say, 'Oh I see, so this is how it always is' because sometimes I block out what it was like. I forget.

**Do you have a favourite stage of moviemaking?**

I usually think that I like all different stages of making a movie but when you get towards the end of one of the stages you're ready for it to end, and you're looking forward to the next part. Thwat's a very common experience for me.

**Do you reflect on recurring stuff in your work, like all the 12-year-olds?**

I don't really. Sometimes I feel like, 'Well this is something that I might have had before in some other form, and do I want to do it again? Do I want to go in some other direction?' Usually if I think about it and decide to stick with it, it's because it feels like something that's built into the story. In the end I would rather make it better than make it... Sometimes I just want to go with whatever is going to make the story stronger and sometimes, for me, that means links between the stories.

## A NOTE FROM JASON SCHWARTZMAN

## TURNING POETRY INTO A STORY

"If I have an idea I say, 'How about this thing?' and if the response is, 'Oh yes that sounds like it could be something good' I will be motivated, but if the response is, 'Hmm maybe' I'm less motivated. The thing with Wes that I really found so inspiring and the opposite of me is that he has this idea and he's like, 'Dogs... Japan...' and it was almost very poetic how vague it was. No one really knew what we were looking for until we hit it. The three of us were like archeologists, just digging and asking, 'What is this? What is this? What is this?' and Wes might be the expert on that particular subject. He'd go, 'Oh yes, this bone is part of the thing'."

**Films are an emotional medium. Do you spend much time trying to build emotion or is it a byproduct?**

Any time you're working on a movie, or on a story, you're developing it. It's saying, 'What have we got and how do we make it better?' Sometimes it means, 'How do we make it scarier?' or 'How do we make it funnier?' or 'How do we make the emotion of the scene reach somebody in a stronger way?' That's always part of just working the material

— AS TOLD TO —
ADAM WOODWARD

# LEAD GRAPHIC DESIGNER ERICA DORN

## DESCRIBES HOW SHE HELPED TO BRING WES ANDERSON'S FUTURE-JAPAN TO LIFE

've lived in London for about 13 years, working at various agencies and also freelance doing a lot of branding and graphic identity. I got the call from Wes' producer because they needed a Japanese-speaking designer. So I went in for a trial and did two weeks designing sake bottles and various bits. I was really nervous but also enthusiastic, and it was unusual because I really didn't know much about the film at that point. I had no idea of the amount of work that would be involved – I began working on the film in November 2015 and finished in January this year.

"I started out doing the graphic design for the sets and that evolved into also doing the titles. I also got to do a voice – it's one of the human characters but it's just background murmuring so no one will really notice it except me. During production, a typical day would be coming in at 8am and finishing up around 7pm. In pre- and post-production it was a little more relaxed. Often we would be making things that would be needed weeks down the line, but during the busiest periods we would be making something and then literally see it shot the next day. So if Wes noticed that a bit of the back wall felt empty, we had to design something to fill that space. It was very fast-paced and exciting, and Wes was involved at every stage of the design, so that helped.

"I never counted but in terms of the overall number of individual pieces we made for the film, I'd say it was well into the thousands. Some sets alone had two hundred pieces. If you take the classroom set for example, we designed everything from the calligraphy which presumably the kids have done; to the Watanabe campaign posters; all the scribbles on the blackboard; there's a banner stretching across the room which says 'Megasaki Senior High'; then all the stuff on the desks like the notebooks and stationary, and also the newspapers and the badges which some of the characters are wearing.

"We were given a wealth of reference images from the production designer and the art director; concept drawings and stills photographs from old Japanese films – a lot of [Akira] Kurosawa and [Yasujirō] Ozu. And there was also the animatic, which is like the moving storyboard. There were a lot of references from the Shōwa period and some from the postwar era too, but most of the images were from the '60s and '70s, which is the period Wes instinctively gravitated towards. But the time period is so ambiguous – it's set 20 years in the future, but we don't know from when. That gave us the freedom to create a look that wasn't chained to one particular time period.

All of the Japanese in the film is real, including the newspaper articles and shop signs; one of our assistants, her family owns a rice shop and we used the name and the logo in one of the background shots for downtown Megasaki. Sometimes people are offended on behalf of other cultures but in Japan there's a lot less criticism of Japan being used as a setting. There was a genuine attempt to be authentic with this film, but obviously it's a slightly filtered version of Japan. I think the film will be very much enjoyed in Japan though, as all Wes Anderson films are. Japan is a culture that is all about absorbing other cultures and reinventing them. It's an amalgamation of everything that we've ever encountered. So I think when a Western director likes Wes wants to do a film about Japan, we're very excited for that cultural cross-pollination to happen."

— AS TOLD TO —
ADAM WOODWARD

# WES ANDERSON'S GO TO PUPPET MASTER ANDY GENT REVEALS THE SECRET TO ORCHESTRATING A MAMMOTH STOP-MOTION PROJECT

y dad was a self-employed high-end cabinet maker and we had a workshop at the bottom of the garden. As a kid I would always go in and make things. One of the very early things I remember making with him was an AT-AT Walker which we carved out of big lumps of pine. After that I got into making puppets and I was always fascinated by automata, these little mechanical toys which you used to have to hand-crank. Then there was an amazing documentary series on Channel 4 called *Four-Mations*; I remember watching an episode of that one Friday night at university and there was an amazing short film called *The Sandman.* The makers were on there talking about how they made it in their bedrooms after work. It was a real eureka moment for me.

I worked on *Isle of Dogs* for around 34 months, all in. It was a lot of hard work. As Head of Puppets my job was to orchestrate the production of all of the puppets to a timescale, and also monitor their ability to perform. Way back at the beginning of a project like this you read the script and try to get an idea of how many characters there are. In this case we knew it was going to be a monumental undertaking for a stop-motion production. Then you bring in all your specialists, from sculptors to mould-makers and prop-makers and jewellers and costumiers and various technicians. Only when you've planned everything out and got everyone in does the process begin to evolve in a three-dimensional sense.

Initially Wes sent me an amazing archival video clip of Japanese drummers to watch before I read the script, and then he gave us a big list of films that he suggested we should familiarise ourselves with. Lots of black-and-white Japanese stuff, and also things like *Akira* and *Grave of the Fireflies*, just to give us a sense of what he was thinking. When it got to the characters we decided to start with the dogs because they really dictated the scale of the movie. We sculpted a selection of dogs, based on a variety of breeds, and Wes chose his favourites. With the humans we worked very closely with character designers, particularly Félicie [Haymoz], who was integral to the whole design process.

Wes loves to play around with scale. With this film he pushed the miniatures a lot, and that creates a charm that only comes from reducing the size. It also allowed us to build these massive landscapes which creates a really lovely style that's pretty unique to Wes. The first time I worked with Wes, on *Fantastic Mr Fox*, I ended up having to relearn so many things because his vision was so specific and so strong and it required us to approach certain things in a new way. With *Grand Budapest Hotel* you start to get used to his way of working, which is very different again to something like *Fox*.

"There are a couple of sequences in this film that were extremely challenging but thrilling to work on. One was the sushi prep sequence. It was conceived and set out as a long one-shot, and we had a team of animators working on it for around three months. It's a camera looking down at various animals being brought in and then being delicately dismembered and prepared by a world-class sushi chef. It's a mixture of mechanics, silica and foam and everything had to look as realistic as possible, so you've got to work out how something is going to look when it's cut, or how it's going to flop around. With the mackerel, say, we had to build everything into the fish which could then come apart easily. That amount of work behind the scenes that goes into something like this is quite spectacular"

ILLUSTRATION
— BY —
SIMON HAYES

# A SHORT BUT VITAL HISTORY OF MOVIE DOGS

DIVISED
— BY —
HANNAH
WOODHEAD

## SCRAPS
A DOG'S LIFE (1918)
MONGREL

### RIN TIN TIN
VARIOUS (1922-31)
GERMAN SHEPHERD

#### PETEY
OUR GANG SHORTS (1922-44)
AMERICAN PITBULL

##### GEORGE
BRINGING UP BABY (1938)
WIRE FOX TERRIER

###### TOTO
THE WIZARD OF OZ (1939)
CAIRN TERRIER

## LASSIE
LASSIE COME HOME (1943)
ROUGH COLLIE

### FLIKE
UMBERTO D. (1952)
JACK RUSSELL TERRIER

#### LADY&TRAMP
LADY AND THE TRAMP (1955)
COCKER SPANIEL & SCHNAUZER

##### WILDFIRE
IT'S A DOG'S LIFE (1955)
BULL TERRIER

###### LADY
GOOD-BYE, MY LADY (1956)
BASENJI

###### OLD YELLER
OLD YELLER (1957)
LABRADOR/MASTIFF CROSS

## BEETHOVEN
BEETHOVEN (1992)
ST. BERNARD

### MILO
THE MASK (1994)
JACK RUSSELL TERRIER

#### FLY & REX
BABE (1995)
BORDER COLLIES

##### RENO
TOP DOG (1995)
BRIARD

###### BALTO
BALTO (1995)
WOLF DOG

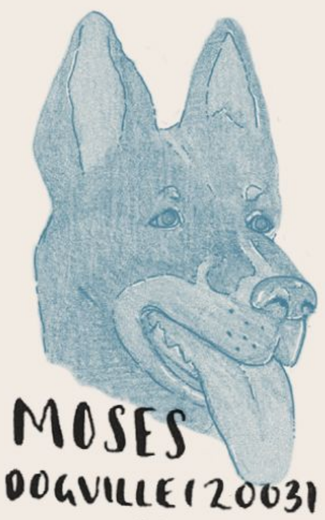
## OLD BLUE/BUDDY
AIR-BUD (1997)
GOLDEN RETRIEVER

### WINKY, BEATRICE, HUBERT, RHAPSODY IN WHITE, MISS AGNES
BEST IN SHOW (2000)
NORWICH, TERRIER, WEIMARANER, BLOOD HOUND, POODLE, SHIH TZU

#### COFI & RICHIE
AMORES PERROS (2000)
ROTTWEILER, LHASA APSO

##### SKIP
MY DOG SKIP (2000)
JACK RUSSELL TERRIER

## BUCKLEY
THE ROYAL TENENBAUMS (2001)
BEAGLE



### MOSES
DOGVILLE (2003)
MONGREL

#### QUILL
QUILL (2004)
YELLOW LABRADOR

##### BOMBÓN
BOMBÓN EL PERRO (2004)
DOGO ARGENTINO

CHIFFON
THE SHAGGY DOG (1959)
OLDENGLISH SHEEP DOG

DILLINGER, BONNIE, CLYDE, MA BARKER
BABY FACE NELSON, PRETTY BOY FLOYD,
THE DOBERMAN GANG (1972)
DOBERMAN PINSCHERS

ROWF & SNITTER
THE PLAGUE DOGS (1981)
LABRADOR-CROSS
SMOOTH FOX TERRIER

EINSTEIN
BACK TO THE FUTURE (1985)
OLD ENGLISH SHEEP DOG

101 OF THEM
101 DALMATIANS (1961)
DALMATIANS

BUCK
CALL OF THE WILD (1972)
GERMAN SHEPHERD

BLOOD
A BOY AND HIS DOG (1975)
MONGREL

UNNAMED
WHITE DOG (1982)
WHITE SHEPHERD

CUJO
CUJO (1983)
ST BERNARD

OTIS
THE ADVENTURES OF MILO & OTIS (1986)
PUG

HACHIKŌ
HACHIKO MONOGATARI (1987)
AKITA

HOOCH
TURNER & HOOCH (1989)
DOGUE DE BORDEAUX

BAXTER
BAXTER (1989)
BULL TERRIER

BOBBY
GREYFRIARS BOBBY (1961)
SKYE TERRIER

BODGER & LUATH
THE INCREDIBLE JOURNEY (1963)
BULL-TERRIER, YELLOW LABRADOR

MUKHTAR
COME HERE, MUKHTAR (1965)
EAST-EUROPEAN SHEPHERD

MICHAEL
MICHAEL, THE DOG THAT SANG (1979
SCHNAUZER

COPPER
THE FOX AND THE HOUND (1981)
BLOODHOUND CROSS

TARO & JIRO
ANTARCTICA (1983)
SAKHALIN HUSKIES

ZOCHOR
THE CAVE OF THE YELLOW DOG (2005)
MONGREL

MARI
A TALE OF MARI AND THREE PUPPIES (2007)
SHIBA INU

MOLLY
O'HORTEN (2007)
BEAGLE CROSS

LUCY
WENDY & LUCY (2008)
MONGREL

MARLEY
MARLEY & ME (2008)
YELLOW LABRADOR

SPITZ
FANTASTIC MR FOX (2009)
BEAGLE

DUG
UP (2009)
GOLDEN RETRIEVER

TULIP
MY DOG TULIP (2009)
GERMAN SHEPHERD

JACK
THE ARTIST (2011)
JACK RUSSELL TERRIER

SNOOPY
MOONRISE KINGDOM (2012)
WIRE FOX TERRIER

BONNIE
SEVEN PSYCHOPATHS (2012)
SHIH TZU

ROXY
GOOD BYE TO LANGUAGE (2014)
MONGREL

HAGEN
WHITE GOD (2014)
MONGREL

DAISY
JOHN WICK (2014)
BEAGLE

LUCKY
ARABIAN NIGHTS (2015)
MALTIPOO

TRUMAN
TRUMAN (2015)
BULL MASTIFF

BOB
THE LOBSTER (2015)
BORDER COLLIE

WIENER-DOG
WIENER-DOG (2016)
DACHSHUND

MARVIN
PATTERSON (2016)
BULLDOG

DANTE
COCO (2017)
XOLOITZCUINTLI

CHIPY
SPITZ
BOMBI
Buckley
Titi
1994-2010
Biscotte
1990-2002
Jou
lili
Dou Dou

# Dog Gone

ILLUSTRATION BY SOPHIE MO

# DOCUMENTING A VISIT TO THE CIMETIÈRE DES CHIENS ET AUTRES ANIMAUX DOMESTIQUES IN PARIS

WORDS BY DAVID JENKINS

As most seasoned Euro travellers will know, Paris is a city which shuts up shop on Sundays and Mondays. For the uninspired tourist, this leaves tramping Haussmann's resplendent, lavishly wide boulevards as the sole form of cultural nourishment. One old reliable on the Paris tourist trail, and usually open all hours, is its graveyards, which are always good for an introspective wander or some macabre celeb spotting. At the sprawling Cimetière du Père Lachaise, you can find Jim Morrison's tombstone festooned with flowers and love notes. A little off the beaten track is the Cimetière de Picpus, final resting place of thousands guillotined during the French Revolution.

But for a genuinely strange and strangely moving afternoon among the dearly departed, hop on the train to the northern suburb of Clichy and chart a course to the Cimetière des Chiens et Autres Animaux Domestiques, which stretches some 250 meters along a muddy embankment of the Seine. Then, for the princely toll of €3.50, a world of pet-based enchantment is yours. To reach the cemetery by foot from the closest Metro station (Gabriel Péri), it's necessary to traverse a long street dotted with ominous vacant lots and stacks of discarded trash, as clinical white housing blocks loom overhead. Pass some cafes and mini-markets, then you'll arrive at a tangle of A-roads, and then next to the sparse-looking Parc Robinson, is your destination.

Despite boasting a grand, Art Nouveau stone archway at its entrance, the black, wrought-iron gates are locked. A small cabin is located behind a bush, and upon closer inspection, an hirsute man in a tracksuit with a yapping Chihuahua on his lap rolls up the dirty shutters over a small window and accepts our fee. The first grave we encounter is a small, slightly misshapen rock with a grey marble plaque bolted to its front. It commemorates an

army dog named Moustache, a Barbet who was struck by a cannon ball in Badajoz, Spain on 3 November, 1811. This small stone sits in the shadow of a towering monument in memory of Barry, a St Bernard who lived from 1800 to 1814. A faded inscription reveals that Barry saved forty souls on the Swiss-Italian border where he worked as a mountain rescue dog. The statue sees a young girl with eyes closed and arms wrapped around Barry's thick neck, while the dogs eyes stare on passively as if this is no big thing.

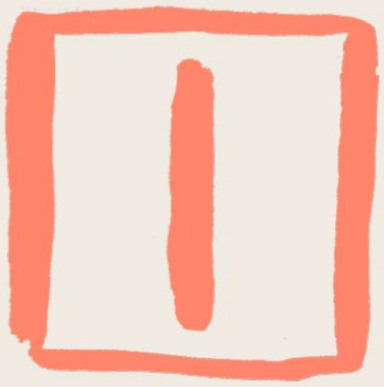
While these great canine heroes initially hog the eyeline, the Cimetière des Chiens is not a historical dwelling for dogs who have served some vital human function. Amble down the six long rows and you'll see memorials of all shapes and sizes for dogs who have done little more than offer comfort and companionship to their thankful owners. A generic, albeit heartfelt black nameplate with functional gold lettering adorns most of the gravestones. There is a commemoration for "notre cherie" Poupette, who boasted a lifespan of 1969 to 1985. Sulky, Ulysse, Ramses, Canelle, Argos, Fantomas, Criquette, Winny, Pudding, Roxy, Tintin and Scampi are the names of unknown breeds (and species) littered across the site.

We visited the cemetery on a rain-lashed Sunday morning, and aside from a woman repotting some flowers, we were the only ones there. It feels apt that the grounds aren't really cornered off from their immediate surroundings but thick bushes are tall walls – it's possible to hear the ambient rush of the Seine, the roar of passing cars, and the bustle of those walking through the adjoining park. It's not a claustrophobic place for private reflection, but more like an ornamental garden intended for a wider public. One cat grave contains a lengthy inscription which is signed off "ta maman" (your mother), so there's obviously much private passion (and anguish) buried in these plots. But these are also public monuments symbolising an inter-species love that perhaps transcends rational contemplation.

Other strange sights in the cemetery include: a miniature cat mausoleum with a cat head symbol carved out of its left wall and an inscription in remembrance of "Mimi"; a plaque containing a photo of a dog's head superimposed onto an 18th Century French Navy uniform above a quote by Victor Hugo; the grave of a German Shepherd named Sultan Galant Vom Hatzfield (1981 – 1996); the grave of a pet turtle named Ezequielle (2002 – 2016); a cracked plastic bowl filled with soiled tennis balls on top of a marble slap containing the name "Arry"; a cracked porcelain statue of Tramp from Lady and the Tramp covered in Mardi Gras beads.

In 1978, the America director Errol Morris channeled this affectionate obsession into his documentary *Gates of Heaven*, about a failing California pet cemetery and the logistical nightmare of transferring the souls of 450 loved ones to new site. That film captured the tragicomic essence of pet ownership and how intense loneliness can sometimes find a balm (if not a cure) through close, almost parental relationships with animals. The Cimetière des Chiens was named a national monument by the French government in 1987, and it stands as a small shrine to those for whom a dog or a cat (or a turtle or a rabbit) is more than a cacher of vermin or a deterrent to thieves

DIRECTOR



n the early 1930s, dogs briefly became Hollywood royalty. Here is the story of the Dogville shorts.

At the dawn of the sound era, MGM produced a set of shorts spoofing popular film genres of the day. All the delights of the audacious Pre-Code days were ripe for lampooning in these 15-minute shakedowns of the backstage musical, the gangster flick, the college comedy, and even the war epic. What made these mini-movies really distinctive is that they weren't just talkies, they were "all-barkie productions", and the stars were all performing pooches.

The *Dogville Shorts* are the perfect Pre-Code curio – risqué, bizarre and scandalous. Performing animals, especially dogs, had been popular in silent movies, from the hit British chase film *Rescued by Rover* in 1905 to the heroic adventures of German Shepherd Rin Tin Tin and his many imitators in the 1920s. Following the sound revolution, audiences preferred stars who could talk, and even sing, and in the early 1930s, there was an increasing appetite for more adult action.

Enter the Dogvilles. The first releases included *Hot Dog* – in which a love-triangle unfolds at a ritzy nightclub, resulting in a murder and a sensational trial – and *College Hounds*, a jolly varsity romp described by British journal *The Bioscope* as "a little romantic affair, in which the hero triumphs on the football field," and which other critics compared favourably to the kid-based *Our Gang* shorts which emerged at the beginning of the 1920s. Dubbed voiceovers (recorded in multiple languages so the films could screen abroad) gave the canine heroes and heroines of the Dogville films dialogue and lyrics – but a combination of intense animal coaching and some ethically dodgy tricks manipulated the dogs into dancing, marching, playing sport, even shooting firearms, canoodling and playing the piano.

Comic specialists Jules Myers and Zion White were the masterminds, directors and often the voices of the Dogville films, which ran from 1929 to 1931. Established Hollywood animal trainer Rennie Renfro, who kept dozens of dogs at his ranch in the San Fernando Valley, was in charge of coaching the "actors". A team of studio technicians outdid themselves creating elaborate sets, detailed costumes and shrunken props for the films. The shorts themselves are funny on at least two levels – some of the gags are fairly sharp, and there's a certain glee to the way in which the Dogville films poke fun at feature-length favourites, although *So Quiet on the Canine Front*, a

ILLUSTRATION
BY
JASON NGAI

# WELCOME TO DOGVILLE

WORDS
BY
PAMELA
HUTCHINSON

"EVEN A CURSORY GLANCE AT THE FILMS REVEALS THAT THE DOGS ARE DRAGGED UP BY PIANO WIRES, A CRUEL AND VERY PAINFUL FORM OF LIVE PUPPETRY."

garbled pastiche of Lewis Milestone's anti-war classic, is in seriously questionable taste. The flipside is the grotesquerie of dogs behaving like humans: walking, talking, shaving, smooching, even assaulting each other in the name of a good storyline. These surreal antics are bound to raise an awkward giggle in the 'so-bad-it's-good' vein, but the more unnatural the dogs' behaviour, the more likely it is that some horribly unnatural methods were used to achieve the shots.

The stars of these films were veteran actors, many of whom had appeared in several silent and sound films in which they had been expected to behave more like, well, dogs, and they were "directed" by a trainer shouting commands off-set. The Dogville requirements were often more complex, and the dogs were apparently manipulated around the set by means of both commands and lures – the trainers would call out to each performer and dangle a toy, a piece of meat or even a live mouse in the direction that he wanted the dog to turn. As one reporter put it, "the set is a regular bedlam of noise with all of the trainers shouting at their respective dogs".

A smear of peanut butter or toffee on the dogs' gums made them clap their lips together to mimic speech. A lively report in *Screenland* magazine circa 1930 suggests that toys were also used to evoke different emotions from the dogs: "See that snake-like whistle with the feather at the end? That helps him register fear, intense surprise. A loved rubber ball means alertness. A toy pistol … means happiness, contentment, and other joyful expressions." The same article, however, "explains" how the dogs manage to walk on their hind legs, human-style, in all the Dogville shorts: "you have to be trained from puppyhood until your muscles harden and your equilibrium is settled." Renfro claimed this training was done by leading the dogs around with a rubber ball, but that is almost certainly nonsense. Even a cursory glance at the films reveals that the dogs are dragged up by piano wires, a cruel and very painful form of live puppetry.

The lead roles in the Dogville comedies were generally taken by the same trio of canine stars, who had their own private quarters at the studio including air-conditioned dressing rooms and a 50-foot dog run. By contrast, the extras milled about in one crowded kennel. Buster was the leading man, a young, excitable collie, while Jiggs, a mongrel, took on the character parts – villains, heavies and scoundrels. The biggest star was Oscar, a gorgeous male Boston terrier with a white face and large, soulful eyes, who played the leading lady. He had an impressive resumé, having appeared in a couple of Ernst Lubitsch features before stooping to comic shorts. *Screenland* reported the sight of Oscar curling up between takes on a chair bearing his name in gilt letters.

Well might Oscar feel entitled to a little star treatment. The Dogville films were big hits in their day, well reviewed by critics and spawning imitations such as *Tiffany's Chimp Family* shorts starring chimpanzees with synchronised dialogue – created by White's brother Jack. Greta Garbo was apparently a fan, and fond of dropping by the set. Dogville's highpoint and its biggest hit, released in 1930, was *Dogway Melody*, a musical featuring dogs performing hits such as 'Mammy' and 'Singin' in the Rain', with Oscar playing the glitzy stage star Queenie pursued by a nefarious brute called Mr Curr. Buster, as Queenie's steady boyfriend, comes to her rescue, but not before a grisly attempted rape scene. Nevertheless, audiences panted for more, and one critic called it,"the funniest comedy that had been produced since the talkies." Oscar, Buster and Jiggs went on promotional tours and were "interviewed" by various movie magazines.

It couldn't last though, and rightly so. The methods used to make animal films, including the Dogville series, were about to come under new scrutiny. Robert Wagner, editor of *The Script* magazine, condemned animal abuse in the film industry in a 1931 article called Movieland Goes Roman. His list of complaints included, "comedy dogs driven almost mad with rubber bands about their muzzles," and was prompted by the release of MGM's jungle-set feature *Trader Horn*, which Wagner said involved "circumstances inexcusable even in a work of art." *Trader Horn* had been pastiched by the Dogville team as *Trader Hound* and it was one of a few Dogville films banned in Britain following complaints made to the BBFC by the Performing and Captive Animals' Defense League.

*Trader Horn* was also the last Dogville short to be released. By 1940, due in part to the extensive harm caused to horses in the making of 1930s westerns, the American Humane Association began to monitor animal use in Hollywood films on set and cruelty was prohibited by the Production Code. Since then, films that treat their animal actors fairly feature a "No Animals Were Harmed" disclaimer in the credits. The Dogville shorts aren't just a vintage curio, they reveal a dark side of the movie business. If only the whimsical creativity that went into them, and the undeniable charisma of their stars, had found a more wholesome outlet

# FILM STARS DON'T DIE IN LIVERPOOL

## DIGITAL DOWNLOAD MARCH 11
## DVD & BLU-RAY MARCH 19

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# MEGASAKI PET CINEMA PRESENTS WES TROSPECTIVE

If the movies have taught us nothing else, it's that when we're at work or asleep, our dogs talk to one another and engage in all variety of banal social activity. The question then arises: if they're chatting, do they also yearn to go to the movies? And if they did, what would they actually chose to watch? Dog-friendly film screenings are one thing, but what about dog-friendly films? We have passed through into an alternative reality to imagine a cinema which caters exclusively to our four-legged friends. And at the Megasaki Pet Cinema this week, there's a retrospective of films by that great dog auteur, Wes Anderson.

*Presenting poster artwork by Andrés Lozano, Sharmelan Murugiah, Luke Brookes, Simon Hayes and Laurène Boglio.*

Illustration by *Andrés Lozano*

"RUFFMORE"

ILLUSTRATED BY SHARM MURUGIAH
PRODUCED BY LITTLE WHITE LIES
SCREENWRITERS DAVID JENKINS AND ADAM WOODWARD
CREATIVE DIRECTOR LAURÈNE BOGLIO

Little White Lies · Studio Murugiah · Dogbone Pictures · TCO



Illustration by *Sharmelan Murugiah*

BOXER ROCKET
ROVER WILSON
RUFUS WILSON
BOUNCER MUSGRAVE
A WES ANDERSON FILM
COLUMBIA PICTURES PRESENTS A GRACIE FILMS PRODUCTION 'BOXER ROCKET' A BOYLE-TAYLOR PRODUCTION CO PRODUCERS RAY ZIMMERMAN
L.M. KIT CARSON MUSIC BY MARK MOTHERSBAUGH EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JAMES L. BROOKS RICHARD SAKAI - BARBARA BOYLE
MICHAEL TAYLOR PRODUCED BY POLLY PLATT - CYNTHIA HARGRAVE WRITTEN BY ROVERWILSON & WES ANDERSON
DIRECTED BY WES ANDERSON
R
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Illustration by *Luke Brookes*

Illustration by *Simon Hayes*

Illustration by *Laurène Boglio*

WORDS & INTERVIEWS
— BY —
MICHAEL LEADER

# THE AGE OF MIRACLES

ILLUSTRATION
— BY —
JAIME JACOB

# QUESTION:
# WHAT is THE FUTURE OF ANIMATION?

**Michael Leader takes its current pulse, while overleaf, 10 industry panelists speculate on things to come.**

t the beginning of 2018, the field of movie animation appears to be in rude health, from the financial viability of the biggest blockbusters to the creative spark behind the most innovative of independent, home-brewed creations. Seven fully-animated films made it into the top 30 highest box office grossers of 2017, including family-friendly studio hits like *Despicable Me 3*, *Coco* and *The Boss Baby*.

Taking a broader view, many of the highest grossing live-action films featured significant, cutting-edge digital animation wielded by visual effects professionals. This was most explicit in the creation of motion-captured characters in *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*, *Beauty and the Beast, Kong: Skull Island* and *War for the Planet of the Apes*. Where visual effects are concerned, we're deep in the age of miracles: animation can turn back time and resurrect the dead, (cf Peter Cushing in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story)*.

Dig beneath the surface of feature animation, beyond big budget offerings by studio behemoths such as Disney, Pixar, DreamWorks and Illumination, and you'll find independent, international projects that are leading the way in developing new perspectives, repurposing analogue techniques and redefining how animated films are created and consumed. Following on from 2009's *Fantastic Mr Fox*, Wes Anderson has returned to animation for the canine comedy, *Isle of Dogs*, which adds to the growing canon of contemprary stop-motion gems which include Claude Baras' *My Life as a Courgette*, Aardman's *Early Man* and LAIKA's *Kubo and the Two Strings*. Awards darling *Loving Vincent* has courted adult audiences with its animated biography of van Gogh, while also breaking new ground with a feature made up of thousands of oil-painted frames.

New technologies and streamlined workflows have enabled filmmakers to dodge the daunting budgets and render farms required of studio animation to make fresh, idiosyncratic features. This include works like Dash Shaw's mumblecore disaster movie *My Entire High School Sinking Into the Sea*, Liu Jian's Chinese crime comedy *Have a Nice Day* and *The Girl Without Hands*, a feature-length fairy tale reportedly animated entirely by director Sébastien Laudenbach. And with new avenues available, projects can succeed outside of the traditional system of distribution. One of the most hotly anticipated, and passionately received, animated works of 2017, Don Hertzfeldt's *World of Tomorrow Episode 2: The Burden of Other People's Thoughts*, was released on the director's own Vimeo page.

Fans of Japanese animation breathed a sigh of relief last year when the news spread that Studio Ghibli legend Hayao Miyazaki was coming out of retirement to make a new short film. However, for years a younger generation of Japanese filmmakers have slogged away in Ghibli's shadow, swinging between conventional adventures clearly bearing Miyazaki's influence, and more radical directions. Ghibli alum Hiromasa Yonebayashi formed Studio Ponoc to produce *Mary and the Witch's Flower*, a greatest-hits tribute act in honour of his former employers, while the exhaustingly prolific enfant terrible Masaaki Yuasa (*Lu Over The Wall; Night Is Short, Walk on Girl*) has drawn inspiration from Japanese, European and American animators and artists to inform his loose, colourful, invigorating and wholly unique style. Towering above these projects is Makoto Shinkai's *Your Name*, the high concept romance that became a blockbuster. We're also seeing anime features directed by women – Naoko Yamada's *A Silent Voice* last year, Mari Okada's *Maquia* later this year – gracing UK cinema screens for the first time.

There is still much work to do. Last year, a study from animation industry scrutinisers Cartoon Brew revealed that 99 of 104 major animated films this decade had a male director, and only one was directed solely by a woman. For the second year running, not one of 2018's major animated features is directed by a woman. However, there is a hint of hope: one milestone achieved this year is that two feature debuts made by female filmmakers were nominated for Best Animated Feature at the Academy Awards: Nora Twomey (Cartoon Saloon's *The Breadwinner*) and Dorota Kobiela (co-director of *Loving Vincent*).

In the dystopian future of David Mitchell's 'Cloud Atlas', movies are referred to by the generic trademark 'Disneys', but while the real-life company continues to gobble up intellectual properties, characters and fictional worlds at an alarming rate, no such homogeneity exists in animation. The form Walt Disney revolutionised with his hugely successful 'folly', *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, over 80 years ago, refuses to be pinned down.

True to its name, animation is always moving. It is powered by innovation, iteration and the necessity for change. And that's not to touch on VR, streaming, shorts, .gifs and grassroots animation collectives, each a pocket of pioneering spirit. Even video games have recently wrestled with animation's past: the fiendishly-difficult platformer *Cuphead* exhumes and celebrates the aesthetic of 1930s Max Fleischer-style 'toons, while stimulating a vibrant discourse exploring its problematic use of racial caricature.

But what about the future of animation? Where is the form going, and what frontiers are left to explore? To answer that question, we approached ten industry figures – animators, academics, programmers and filmmakers – to discuss the trends, technologies and techniques that inspire and intrigue them.

## 1. Dorota Kobiela

*Co-director, Loving Vincent*

I would like the future of animation to allow me to be able to make films with artistic freedom and within a reasonable amount of time (two years instead of seven) and that means financiers and institutions need to believe in art-house film, believe in animation for adults and believe in the sophistication of the audience. I believe that audiences want diverse stories and new visual approaches. I hope that now that five million people have already watched *Loving Vincent* in cinemas, and that we have earned nominations from BAFTA and the Oscars, that film financiers and distributors will be more willing to explore exciting new territory with us.

## 2. Hugh Welchman

*Co-director, Loving Vincent*

Because of the success of *Loving Vincent*, the future of animation to me is painting animation. Oil painting animation has been around since the mid-'60s, however no one until us made a feature film. At first I marvelled at this oversight, but after years of terrible struggle to raise the money for *Loving Vincent*, I understood why none had been made. During production I stated that, even though I really wanted to keep doing painting animation after *Loving Vincent*, I would only pursue this if *Loving Vincent* was a success with audiences: it has been a huge success.

Our budget was $5.5m, and already we've grossed $36m worldwide, and it is still in cinemas in many countries. It is one of the most successful animations for an adult audience of all time, and we've received top nominations, like the Academy Award, Golden Globe and BAFTA. The film has been a hit in places as varied as Mexico, China, Poland, Italy, America, the Middle East and the Netherlands. So this opens the door for more painting animation.

And that's good: animation has always thrived on diversity and innovation. With diversity there is a lot of cross-pollination of ideas. For example: I wouldn't have been able to make *Loving Vincent* without my background in puppet animation, VFX and live action.

There were times when animation got stuck in a rut, like with 2D films in the 1980s, and with CG films at the beginning of this century. Now, it is more open. Aardman and LAIKA have had big hits with puppet animation, there has been a revival of hand-drawn 2D, and there are more mixed-technique films. One of the biggest remaining barriers is animation breaking out of kids and family niche

and being able to tackle teenage and adult-only subjects. There have been occasional commercial success stories, like *Sausage Party*, but they are very rare. *Loving Vincent* will help with audience acceptance of animation for adults, and I think that the painting animation format is particularly good for this, as it isn't indelibly associated with cuddly characters like drawn animation, puppet animation and computer animation, and doesn't have to overcome this preconception in the minds of audiences.

Loving Vincent *is available to buy on Digital, Blu-Ray and DVD now.*

## 3. Lee Unkrich

*Director, Coco*

We have a lot of great people at Pixar. We have a lot of new voices that are just coming up into the ranks for the first time. Peter Sohn, who directed *The Good Dinosaur*, is a great, unique voice, and we're gonna be seeing more from him in the future. I have a number of story guys, particularly women, who are going to be stepping up and starting to direct. It's an exciting time.

In general, I'm glad to hear that Hayao Miyazaki is making another film. He's amazing. He's been so inspirational to so many of us. I've actually liked seeing some traditional live-action filmmakers make steps into animation, like Wes Anderson. I don't think the two worlds need to be so segregated. I think the work that we're doing is very much on a par with what's being done in live-action, and the way we make the films is very similar, so it kind of makes sense for there to be cross-contamination between animation and live-action these days.

Coco *will be released on DVD and Blu-ray later in 2018.*

## 4. Dash Shaw

*Director, My Entire High School Sinking Into the Sea*

Now that technology has allowed anyone with access to a computer and programmes, or even just a phone, the ability to make animation, there should be an abundance of personal, unusual, idiosyncratic cartoons. If the person has internet access, they can post online and have a potentially huge audience for their work, or at least find like-minded artists. These tools, I hope, will only become more accessible as time goes on. So, I'm optimistic about the future of the animation medium. As it becomes easier to create and share animation, the flood of new work will be difficult to sort through, but there are smart curators of animated shorts, like the Eyeworks Festival and the Magic Floot in the United States. I'm sure there are similar things in other countries.

Ultimately, the future of the medium is in the hands of the artists, and whether or not forward-thinking, smart, imaginative people decide to work in the animation medium. I hope they do. Of course, the animation medium is connected to the animation industry, but they are two different things. I'm less optimistic about the industry, which I know so little about it would be foolish for me to pontificate on. What kind of animation do I personally want to see? Cartoons that are strongly felt, and have a unique perspective.

My Entire High School Sinking Into the Sea *is available to buy on Blu-Ray and DVD now.*

## 5. Dani Abram

*Co-organiser, Cardiff Animation Festival*

The future of animation, from my perspective, can be boiled down to the word 'collaboration'. I see it more and more as a festival programmer and as an animation fan. My two favourite animated feature works are co-productions across multiple studios: the recently Oscar-nominated *Loving Vincent* (a co-production between the UK and Poland) and the gorgeous *Song of the Sea*, which partnered Irish studio Cartoon Saloon with several studios across mainland Europe.

In terms of shorts, animators are mobilising across the planet to create work together. The global independent animation collective Late Night Work Club is a fantastic example of this. The rotating collective of indie animators has so far released two brilliant anthologies, to widespread acclaim. It has successfully promoted the individual animators (Kirsten Lepore's *Hi Stranger* is a noteworthy example) as well as further refined their own style as a collective (David Kamp's amazing soundtracks serve to unify the various stories).

Outside of internationally recognised projects, animators are joining forces on a smaller scale to challenge themselves, to fit personal work around a day job, or just for fun. In Cardiff alone we have an amazing community that turns out to our Cardiff Animation Nights, a free networking and screening event where we show animated short films from around the world, as well as a 'Bring Your Own Animation' and 'Animation Grill' events, where attendees are encouraged to show their work-in-progress to the audience for feedback and to find help. Joining forces offers a chance to grow your own body of work, in a supportive environment.

Our Cardiff Animation Nights team came together through animation – none of us knew each other before coming to these events and coming on board to help make them happen. We're now working together to build a brand

new animation festival in Cardiff, something which is way bigger than any one of us could have created alone.

Collaborations not only serve the purpose of sharing resources, but lead to some wonderfully unique works, both large and small.

*Cardiff Animation Festival runs 19–22 April cardiffanimation.com*

## 6. Nora Twomey

*Director, The Breadwinner*

To speculate on the future of animation, you must first define the term 'animation'. In an environment where photoreal animation is described as live action and rotoscoping is described as animation, it is an impossible question to answer – animation is simply too broad a term. For me, the most exciting development in the area is accessibility.

Anyone can go online and find out how to animate or how to tell a story. You can find like-minded creatives to develop sound design or a musical score. You can see how others did it, you can learn from their mistakes. You can begin to create something from very little resource and you can put your work online to become part of the everyday noise. If the work has managed to communicate something, it will, over time, rise above that noise.

Animation has the potential to reach parts of the human psyche other forms of storytelling cannot. Animation can be used as part of a live event, it can harness technologies on the cutting edge or the oldest of film equipment and techniques. A medium with such blurred boundaries means it also has blurred limitations. At its core, I feel animation is most successful when it attempts to mirror abstract reality back at us; animation can help us explore truths we are not fully conscious of. I think that's where the form is most interesting, and I think that's where I'll follow it.

The Breadwinner *is released in UK cinemas 25 May*

## 7. Nag Vladermersky

*Festival director,*
*London International Animation Festival*

Through running the London International Animation Festival I get to watch over 2,500 short films every year – and the number keeps growing. If I had been asked this question 10 years ago, I would have said that the future will be an explosion of people of all ages and abilities making their own animated short films due to the software getting cheaper (and in many cases being free). So now anyone with time and perseverance on their side can make a film and get their stories told and even find a global audience on viewing platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo.

However this doesn't mean that because there are more films being made that the standard is any higher – but that's another question.

What I would say is that there is still a myth that pervades among many people that computers have taken over the world of animation and more traditional forms (drawn, puppet, clay, stop-motion, cut-out, cameraless, etc) are dying out. This is not true. We have seen the traditionalists digging their heels in, continuing to make their mini-masterpieces in the ways they know best as well as younger animators telling their stories in more traditional ways. Plus we are seeing many more hybrid forms of animation – the best films that come our way have a story to tell (whether it's a conventional or an abstract story) and the technique should always comes second to the message of these films.

Two trends we have noticed in the last few years is more animated documentaries being made and more futuristic/ sci-fi tales being told. This could be due to the increasingly desperate times we live in – filmmakers searching for truth and meaning in real life stories as well as looking for glimmers of hope in possible futures.

*For updates on the London International Animation Festival, head to liaf.org.uk*

## 8. Pablo Grillo

*Animation Director, Framestore (*Paddington 2, Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*)*

Animation is so many things it is sort of impossible to say. For me animation is, having grown up with the background of drawn animation, something analogue. I always think that the fundamental magic of animation is what happens when you put two drawings together and it suddenly lives. I think that pure expression in form is where the magic of animation lies and I hope that wherever animation goes it doesn't lose that magical core and become too technical.

With analogue mediums like drawing and painting things are very handmade and they carry an expressive richness – the format, the artistry and just the expressive quality of a brushstroke or a pencil line. CGI, in a way, is sort of cursed. I think that just to create visuals that have life and immediacy and expression is still very difficult. The computer allows you to reach levels of details and subtlety with drawing and with sculpture and with animatronics, but I think that what is difficult to do or what's very difficult to achieve is that raw energy of what comes out of the stroke of the hand.

Digital imagery is becoming so proficient as to imitate human faces. And I do see that as quite seductive, this idea that you don't have to deal with the compromises of shooting live or on a set and you'll soon be able to do all of

"IN A WAY, CGI IS CURSED. I THINK THAT TO JUST CREATE VISUALS THAT HAVE LIFE AND IMMEDIACY AND EXPRESSION IS STILL VERY DIFFICULT."

– PABLO GRILLO –

that and manage all the processes behind filmmaking sitting in the comfort of an edit seat. It's a bit like playing God, being able to crack the nut of how to re-create a real person. We're impossible to cheat: our brains are so finely tuned as to recognise faces and genuine emotions and especially a familiar character – whether that is Peter Cushing or Carrie Fisher. It's very bold to go there, and I think just the process of doing that will always push that technology further.

## 9. Steve Henderson

*Senior Lecturer, Manchester Metropolitan University; Editor, skwigly.com; Director, Manchester Animation Festival*

I recently hosted a series of screenings of international animated short films, curated by Jeni Hall for skwigly.com. Before every screening I asked for a show of hands from the audience. Firstly I asked people working in animation would to their hands up. Secondly I asked people to raise their hand if they had come to the screening to see something they had never seen before. The second group is always the largest. This is exciting because people *want* to see new things, and animation can provide that with ease.

Animation is as creative today as it has been since its earliest days. As technology advances, we find the flexible form of animation fits snugly into conversations about VR and a variety of augmented platforms, where it can be moulded to create immersive environments from scratch. It's important to realise that you don't need the technology to make the animation work, but the animation needs to work in order for the technology to flourish.

As consumers are spending more on VR and immersive technology they will only continue to do so if the content is worth spending the money on. This rule is evident in our cinemas today, it is not just the technology that makes a good film – it's the story. So whether a film is made using banks of whirring computers like the ones that rendered Pixar's *Coco* or the piles of clay that were sculpted into Aardman's *Early Man*, it's the story that people go to see and it's the story that people remember. The art of animation will persist whatever technology is developed in the coming years. So long as creatives are indulged in telling tales and creating new realities that people wish to revisit over and again, animation has a very bright future indeed.

## 10. Richard Clegg

*Animation Supervisor, Moving Picture Company*

In the past, traditional 2D animation was a very specific field within a very specific medium. But over the years, as technology has progressed, the lines between realism and cartoons have blurred. If you look at Pixar films these days, they're pushing their rendering technology to move towards a photorealistic aesthetic, even if the characters in their movies are quite caricatured. All of that same technology we use for visual effects.

The film that I've just worked on was *Blade Runner 2049*. In creating the character of Rachael, we had to achieve most photorealistic animation possible: trying to match a person. But with Rachael, it couldn't be just anyone: it had to be Sean Young from the 1980s. The uncanny valley is a problem when doing people, specifically because the audience feels a sense of revulsion – that something's not quite right. After millions of years of evolution, we're used to studying and judging other people's motives through their face, so there's a lot of natural expertise that every single person has that subconsciously that tells them whether it looks right.

So it's incredibly challenging, but it was interesting to see the comments we got on Rachael. I've seen the 'uncanny valley' thing thrown around a lot less for her. I heard a lot of people saying they were not sure if it was a real person, or if it was de-ageing and they weren't sure how we did it. I think now that that technology is at a certain level, studios and filmmakers can take advantage of that and keep key characters around for sequels and expanding franchises.

Knowledge bases and skill sets are always improving, as well as all the technology. If you look at certain films, especially superhero movies, so much of what audiences watch and think is shot by a camera is actually fully digital. If you take *The Jungle Book* for example, it's just Mowgli on a blue screen for a lot of the time. And then there's *Planet of the Apes* as well – those performances are taken directly from people, but on the big screen it's all digital. And that's something that is only going to grow. The future is constantly blurring the boundaries of between practical, live action and fully digital film

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# Ten Things You Probably Didn't Know About John Williams

*In celebration of Films in Concert at the Royal Albert Hall, this year showcasing the work of John Williams, we take a closer look at the man waving the baton on some of the most beloved film soundtracks of all time.*

Musical talent runs in the Williams family - John's father, Johnny Williams, was a jazz percussionist with the Raymond Scott Quintet, and later worked for 20th Century Fox. John's brothers, Donald and Jerry, are also percussionists. John's son, Joseph Williams, is the lead vocalist for rock band Toto, best known for their 1982 hit 'Africa'.

While attending the University of California, Williams was tutored by the composer Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, who also taught Henry Mancini. Williams would go on to work for Mancini as a session musician, notably working with him on the soundtrack for private eye television series Peter Gunn.

Williams has provided the scores for all but three of Steven Spielberg's 31 films, including *Jaws*, *ET*, and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. The ones he missed? *The Colour Purple* (Quincy Jones provided the music), Bridge of Spies (Williams dropped out due to poor health, and recommended Thomas Newman to Spielberg as his replacement) and *Ready Player One*, which Williams was supposed to score, but dropped out of, in order to work on *The Post* instead. He was replaced by Alan Silvestri.

The distinctive two-note shark theme from *Jaws* was played on a tuba – though the musician who performed it, Tommy Johnson, questioned why it wasn't played on the more suitable French horn. Williams replied that he wanted it to sound "a little more threatening". When Williams first demonstrated the deceptively simple idea to Spielberg, he is believed to have laughed and thought it was a joke.

Williams has been nominated for 51 Academy Awards, 6 Emmys, 25 Golden Globes, 67 Grammys, and 15 Baftas. He received his first Oscar nomination in 1967 for his *Valley of the Dolls* score, and his first win in 1971 for *Fiddler on the Roof*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Williams is the most Oscar-nominated person alive today. He's just behind the most Oscar-nominated person ever – Walt Disney – who received 59 nominations during his lifetime. We can only assume Williams has a big mantelpiece.

Not all of his works have been winners though. In 1981, he composed a score for Allan Arkush's *Heartbeeps* starring Andy Kaufman. The film – which centered on two robots who fall in love and attempt to start a family together – was a commercial and critical flop, but Williams' score is an experimental delight, featuring electronic keyboards combined with a traditional orchestra.

In a 2002 interview with The Guardian, Williams picked *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *Schindler's List* as his favourite Spielberg films. Of Close Encounters, he remarked "it was more than just Cellophane going through a projecting machine, it had a kind of life."

Williams first recorded a score with the London Symphony Orchestra in 1971, for *Fiddler on the Roof*. Since then he has recorded 15 of his scores with the LSO, including *Star Wars*, *Superman*, and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

When working on Close Encounters, Williams composed over 300 example of the five-note communication motif – which the scientists use to communicate with the visiting spaceship - before Spielberg chose one, which was then incorporated into the film's (now iconic) signature theme.

Williams still holds the record for the highest grossing instrumental-only soundtrack album of all time for 1977's *Star Wars IV: A New Hope*. A further six of Williams' scores are certified gold by the Recording Industry Association of America, meaning they have sold over 500,000 copies each. Incidentally – Williams' favourite Star Wars character is Yoda.

Royal Albert Hall

*Experience the soundtracks of John Williams brought to life with live orchestra at screenings of Close Encounters of the Third Kind, Jurassic Park, Star Wars and more, as well as a special appearance from the legendary composer himself, conducting the London Symphony Orchestra later this year. Discover more at royalalberthall.com/films*

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Kiki

# THE Dog Collar

A column about clothes and movies by Christina Newland

# Threads

Illustration by Laurène Boglio

## #6: The Dog Collar

In Vittorio De Sica's neorealist tearjerker from 1952, *Umberto D*, the central protagonist is a lonely impoverished, soul living in post-war Rome. Umberto (Carlo Battisti) resides in a crumbling apartment block run by a mean-spirited landlady. He has few companions - or possessions - left in this world. His best friend and sole reason for living is a cheerful little terrier named Flike, and the pair rely on each other heavily.

Movie dogs are as beloved as they are common, from Charlie Chaplin's 1981 silent film *A Dog's Life* through to the sulky stare of Adam Driver's bulldog in Jim Jarmusch's *Paterson* from 2016. Big or small, when they're companions to a human protagonist, there is one thing that almost all cinema canines share: a collar. The wholesome yellow lab in 2008's *Marley & Me* sports an all-American red collar – both iconic and dependable. Killer pitbulls owned by Nazi thugs get spiky collars and full-body harnesses to keep them under control, as in the 2015 thriller *Green Room*. There are about as many types of dog collars as there are dogs.

If a dog is a loyal friend and a kind comfort, he is also, frankly, something else: chosen by breed, size and temperament to fit around his owner's lifestyle. Collars indicate this with little symbolic confusion. In *Legally Blonde*, Elle Woods' high-maintenance chihuahua wears delicately girly bracelets around his neck, including, at one point, an expensive Tiffany's heart bracelet. He's a complement to his well-accessorised owner, but many dogs are less extravagant than Bruiser Woods. Take Chaplin's street mutt Scraps in *A Dog's Life* – he may have a simple rope collar, but the leash attached to it is the link that keeps the dog and the Little Tramp connected. The pair tough it out on the streets together, and Chaplin actually forgoes the use of his trusty cane so he can hang on to Scraps.

Kelly Reichardt's 2008 heartbreaker *Wendy and Lucy* is a salt-of-the-earth odyssey based around an impoverished nomad (Michelle Williams) searching for work and her lost dog Lucy. When she uses Lucy's faded canvas collar to fasten her outside a store, it's indicative of a temporary absence. But when Lucy is taken away by authorities and eventually rehoused, that moment becomes the last one in which Lucy's collar has any real meaning. A collarless dog – as with the beautiful Siberian Husky in the opening scenes of John Carpenter's *The Thing* – is a telling sight. The audience does not yet know that the husky is infected with alien blood, but when we see that the dog has no collar, we know it's lost or wild. Either way, the foreshadowing is clear: something has gone very wrong.

At its most basic, in both real life as in the movies, a dog collar represents ownership. It ensures the safety of the animal wearing it, and for a mischievous, exploring pup, a collar helps it to remain in safe places – and single-handedly denotes the relationship between human and dog. *John Wick* sees its eponymous hero (played by Keanu Reeves) bent on revenge after burglars kill his tiny beagle puppy Daisy. He places her collar on his bedside table as a way to remember. In *Umberto D*, Flike's collar tags are what helps him to be reunited with his loving owner when he runs off and ends up in a dog pound. Ultimately, collars are a symbol for what dogs and humans so often share with each other: unconditional love.

As Umberto's financial situation grows increasingly desperate, he brings himself to consider panhandling on the street. In the final moment, with his hat outstretched for coins, his pride kicks in, and he abruptly gives his hat to Flike the dog. The moment of despair turns into a cute trick, and Flike shoulders the burden of begging alongside his owner. That's the sort of filial bond between owner and dog that the collar represents.

The circular shape of a collar is a self-evident choice. But the circle has broader represention. For hundreds of years, a round band of gold symbolises everlasting love. The wedding ring is a symbol of that; unbroken and continuous. Not many of us put a gold band around our dog's necks, to be sure. But it seems fair to say that if we're looking for a fairytale kind of love – of the unselfish, loyal, forever variety – a pet dog is a pretty safe bet

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# THE ISLE OF DOGS ISSUE

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## REVIEW

ETTA JAMES

*at last !*

*Interview by* SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN *Illustration by* MONICA BARENGO

# Claire Denis

## One of greatest directors working today picks apart the romantic gamesmanship of her wonderful *Let the Sunshine In*.

Claire Denis is a doyenne of mood, atmosphere and the movements of the body. Her films often feature memorable dance sequences. The famous finale of 1999's *Beau Travail* sees Denis Lavant absolutely lose himself to Corona's 'Rhythm of the Night'. Equally joyful abandon exists in 1994's *US Go Home*, while a highlight of her latest, *Let The Sunshine In*, sees Juliette Binoche, eyes closed in a nightclub, swaying to 'At Last' by Etta James, her face glowing with private exultation. Denis likes to write her films with others. Jean-Pol Fargeau co-wrote eight of her 12 fiction features (make that nine once *High Life* with Robert Pattinson arrives later this year). This time she pursued a collaboration with Christine Angot, a playwright whose short script about a couple breaking up, *Voilà l'enchaînement*, Denis directed in 2014. Once again, the talents of her longest-term allies – cinematographer Agnès Godard, whom she met on the set of *Paris, Texas* (on which she worked as assistant director), and actor Alex Descas – are in the mix. The result is a romcom which doubles as a humanist pearl for the ages. It stars Juliette Binoche as Isabelle and is the role she was born to play. Her freshly divorced, romantically open character has the full force of a performer who has lived with her heart and knows how to express its most subtle inflections.

**LWLies: Do you think we are living in a time that lets women tell stories about having many partners?** Denis: No, no. Nothing changed for me except getting older. It was my relationship with Christine [Angot] – we enjoyed the story. It has nothing to do with any sort of synchronicity. This is the kind of thing I never consider. The only time that is good for me is when we have a budget that makes the film doable. That's it. That's the right time.

**How do you decide that you want to work with a writer? In this case, with Christine.** We worked before together for years. We like each other, we are very different. I like her stuff very much. I made a film already based on a piece of dialogue she wrote about a couple splitting.

**When it's someone new, how do you know if you are willing to take them on as a collaborator?** When I met Christine I never thought I was going to be collaborating with her. As the time went by we realised that we enjoy the same things, we enjoy being together. I never chose her as a collaborator, I chose her as a friend first. Then, when I did make that short film from her dialogue, she was surprised. She said, 'Oh, it seems you can film my words so easy,' and I said 'Yes, let's go on'. Collaboration, if it's not based on something true, doesn't work so well.

**It was initially said that this film was going to be an adaptation of Roland Barthes' book, 'Fragments of a Lover's Discourse'.** There was all sorts of mixed information on the internet. The producer of my movie had also bought the rights to adapt 'Fragments of a Lover's Discourse'. He had in mind to do it with maybe 10 different directors, each one a chapter. At some other time he asked me if I would like to work with him. I was expecting to prepare another film so I had a little time free. So I told him, 'Maybe I can, if you gave me freedom.' I had just finished the short film with Christine about a couple who are splitting up and wanted to go on with her. Then there was a mix up in the studio and the people in charge of Roland Barthes' estate asked my producer if they could read the script because they suspected that we stole things from Barthes. After, they said, 'No, this is a piece of shit, of course the name of Roland Barthes cannot be on that.' It was very funny, because ever since everyone has asked me and Christine, 'Is it an adaptation of Roland Barthes?' I said, 'No no, please stop.' But since my first film I always like to build plot out of a block of moments, not to have a real continuity. I love ellipses so I was always working this way, and those blocks could be interpreted as fragments of a life but all my films are a little bit fragmentary. So yeah, in a way there was this connotation.

**Do you think that once sex is involved, relationships between the sexes necessarily involve manipulation?** Yes and no. If I take myself as an example it would be easy for me to tell you no. When I love, I love. I am not manipulating. But if I look at my own life or other people's lives from a certain distance, I can see that in the approach of someone to be loved by someone else there is probably a certain – not manipulation – but a sort of temptation to transform reality a little bit.

**How about your profession? Doesn't the work of a director involve manipulation of the actors and audience?** I don't agree with that. In films there is a sort of trust, it doesn't last for a long time but that trust is very important. If I was thinking only for one second that I could manipulate Juliette to be more this or that for the audience... My only strength in directing is trust, and to be completely ready for her and nothing else. That's what matters for me.

**Can you talk about the soundtrack? An Etta James poster is on the wall of Juliette's house and there is the incredible dancefloor scene set to 'At Last'.** Etta James was the exemplary woman for the film. When I first spoke to Juliette I told her, 'You have to consider Etta James, what kind of a woman she was.' She wanted more love – more and more. She would go

**“Someone who has not experienced being hurt by love, for me, is not a real human. They are just a machine, you know.”**

on stage with a provocative dress. She was asking so much to be loved, to be able to love. Etta James is a real, real loose figure. I always told Juliette, ‘that’s your figure for the film, Etta James’. A special woman. She started singing when she was 12 in cabaret. She is a wild, wild woman screaming for love.

**The dialogue seems like a dance, there is not always the perfect answer. Did you work on it with the actors?** There is a strange thing with Christine, we are always looping dialogue. Each character repeats himself as a sort of protection. For instance, Isabelle keeps asking, ‘Okay, but why?’ but then the loop goes back so she is condemned to hear dialogue with no gate to enter.

**There is a comment from a gallerist friend to Isabelle that it’s easier to have a relationship with someone from the same social background, which she repeats in the next scene to her working class lover. Is this a line you think is used as an excuse in relationships for when it goes wrong?** No. I think the gallerist is trying his best to discourage her from having an affair with this guy she met in a nightclub in the countryside and he used the meanest way. You know? He said, ‘This guy is not of our milieu’. Isabelle is a painter, not yet very famous, she does not belong to that milieu either. She suffers, in a way, with the group of people she is surrounded by, and she is looking for something free and true. She finds it in that nightclub and then this so-called friend discourages her. You would imagine, because she says no, no, no, no. She is firm, very firm, in front of the gallerist, but then when she is walking home suddenly a fear came up and she calls Sylvain. She says, ‘Sylvain please tell me, tell me’ and she needs the only answer Sylvain cannot give her.

**The last scene with Gérard Depardieu is incredible. Did you write the character for him?** No, no, the script was written before. After talking and talking to the producers I described the way I wanted the film to end and I suddenly saw Gérard... He had the power to say this incredible loop of words seriously and deeply, to almost convince her. And he did, as if his body itself was a protection, like a wall, and it’s reassuring. The softness of Gérard is in the extremely delicate way he pronounces certain words. As with the title, what he says is hard to understand. He cannot speak a very elaborate French, he speaks bad, not very educated French. The guy who did the subtitles said, ‘Claire I am afraid they will think I made a mistake on the subtitles.’ But only Gérard could do that. For me it was obvious there was no one else.

**He’s in a position of power and he’s trying to manipulate her.** He is not trying to manipulate her, he is trying to make her believe that he could affect a future, which is fake. If you go to see a clairvoyant, of course his job is to try and make you believe that he can see a good future. An open future.

**Now he’s a lover down, I thought he was trying to plant the seed that she is open to having him as a lover?** In a way, maybe, yeah. I told Gérard, ‘Try also to convince her that there is an authentic guy, and that’s what she needs.’ But it’s like a guy selling ice cream on the beach, for me, it’s more poignant than manipulative.

**His character wouldn’t have been the same without showing him with Valeria Bruni Tedeschi in the previous scene.** When we were working on the script I said, ‘If Gérard says yes, I want to add this scene to show a broken hearted guy in complete despair.’

**Why’s that?** Because he is a real human. Someone who has not experienced being hurt by love, for me, is not a real human. They are just a machine, you know.

**Is having love affairs with people helpful for making art?** I think not to have love affairs, not to have love, pain, pain in your heart, means that you are not a very well finished human being. And therefore, maybe you are a very special artist with no art. If you are really a human you have felt this pain once or twice, or maybe 50 times. It means you are alive.

**There is an industry conversation about how it's harder for women to land jobs as they get older.** Me, I am amazed by the beauty of Juliette. I never think about her age. Maybe it’s harder for a woman as they get older yet, so many actresses – Catherine Deneuve, Isabelle Huppert, Juliette Binoche – they prove exactly the opposite. When I took Isabelle to Cameroon when I did *White Material*, she was like a little girl. I thought I was directing a young girl. It’s terrible to imagine films with only young women. That would be a disaster for me, really

# HAVE A NICE DAY

67 Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin
Competition

## A FILM BY LIU JIAN

A NEZHA BROS. PICTURES COMPANY LIMITED / LE-JOY ANIMATION STUDIO PRESENTATION
A LE-JOY ANIMATION STUDIO PRODUCTION A LIU JIAN FILM "HAVE A NICE DAY" VOICES ZHU CHANGLONG
CAO KAI / LIU JIAN / YANG SIMING / SHI HAITAO / MA XIAOFENG / XUE FENG / ZHENG YI /
CAO KOU EDITED BY MINBING XIAOLIU MUSIC THE SHANGHAI RESTORATION PROJECT
SOUND DIRECTOR LI DANFENG CO-PRODUCER JIN RUI PRODUCERS YANG CHENG / LIU JIAN
PRODUCED BY LYNNE WANG EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS YANG CHENG / LIU JIAN WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY LIU JIAN
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## IN CINEMAS MARCH 23

MUBI

# Let the Sunshine In

*Directed by*
**CLAIRE DENIS**
*Starring*
**JULIETTE BINOCHE**
**XAVIER BEAUVOIS**
**PHILIPPE KATERINE**
*Released*
**20 APRIL**

**5**

**ANTICIPATION.**
*Claire Denis has raised the bar extremely high for herself.*

**5**

**ENJOYMENT.**
*Scintilating and complex, boasting a career-best performance from Juliette Binoche.*

**5**

**IN RETROSPECT.**
*Much more than a stop-gap before Denis tackles her first sci-fi movie,* High Life.

A white backdrop stapled to a floor, filmed from a high angle; on it crouches Isabelle (Juliette Binoche), a Paris-based abstract painter. Brush and palette in hand, she begins to move around, filling in the space beneath her feet. The shot ingeniously positions Isabelle as author and subject. The canvas pulls double duty as her frame and ours. It offers a glimpse of a creative process that is serenely yet maddeningly enigmatic. Are these slow, languorous, black-on-white strokes planned, or extemporaneous? Or, put another way: does Isabelle already see the bigger picture, or is she just making it up as she goes along?

*Let the Sunshine In* is very much the proverbial portrait of the artist, as well as of an artistic community, marking the first time that director Claire Denis has explicitly dealt with creativity as a theme (not counting her documentary portraits of her mentor Jacques Rivette and choreographer Mathilde Monnier). It's also, at least superficially, a romantic comedy, tracking Isabelle – who is 50, divorced, and sharing custody of a 10-year-old daughter – through a series of troubled relationships and sexual encounters with men in what is referred to insistently (by one of her suitors, a snide gallery owner played by Bruno Podalydes) as her "milieu". The common denominator between her partners, who include a banker, an actor and a curator, as well as her evidently artsy ex-husband, is a well-heeled snobbishness and solipsism that extends, by action and implication, to Isabelle herself.

It is in this unshowy, unsparing examination of class and social status that *Let the Sunshine In* shows its hand. In 2013's *Bastards*, Denis railed against late capitalist monsters whose deep pockets subsidised bottomlessly depraved appetites. Now, working in what seems to be a lighter mode, she continues her project. When Isabelle explains to a female friend that she was only able to come during sex with one well-monied lover by focusing on her disgust for everything he represented, it's a startling, hilarious, lacerating moment. The word she repeats in her story, over and over, is "bastard", explaining how naming him as such (to herself) is what allowed her to get off: it's a put-down that's also a confession. Conversely, after hooking up with a man from outside her circle – the first truly romantic figure in the film, heralded by an Ella Fitzgerald soundtrack cue – Isabelle is coerced into doubt by a colleague who acidly asks if her new partner is on "welfare". Later, she parrots this same condescension at her lover, whose response is devastatingly sad.

Denis isn't simply making a movie about the difficulties – both externally imposed and dredged up from within in response – for women on or past the threshold of middle age to find, reclaim, or fully disavow "true love", which is itself a rich and original theme. She subjects her heroine (and, some might suggest, projected alter ego) to an analysis of how and why she makes her choices. In a lesser movie, it would simply be a case of grotesque men lined up unappetisingly in front of a woman who deserves better, even if we know it and she doesn't. Yet in writing, direction and acting (Binoche is as good here as she's ever been), *Let the Sunshine In* is considerably more complex, and less flattering, both to its audience and the character. Isabelle's plight is circumstantial and self-willed: the film's funniest and most cathartically surprising moment takes place during a group walk in the woods and involves a leather-lunged rejection of her peers' entitled largesse, which also contradicts her own professional aspirations. Where a Michael Haneke would be cruel (and probably cast Isabelle Huppert to play up the character's self-destructive tendencies), Denis, who can also sometimes be stringent to the point of acidity, plays fair, and also funny.

On this point: after two viewings, I'm still not quite sure what to make of the film's bizarre and quite hilarious extended coda. This finds Isabelle – stung by yet another break-up and seemingly at her wits' end – soliciting the advice of a self-styled psychic (played, amazingly, in bull-necked close-up by Gérard Depardieu). Lulled by his patter and promises of better things to come, she absorbs dubious advice with what might be a flake's naiveté or else the relief of somebody allowing herself at last to be guided down a different path. ("Be open," he tells her, slyly echoing the radio broadcast in Denis' *Vendredi Soir* that compels Valérie Lemercier's character to offer a ride to a stranger en route to a one-night stand). If it's hard to reconcile the nervously smiling, deferential woman in the final sequence with the driven, confident artist seen earlier, the shift fits Denis and co-writer Christine Angot's daringly elastic approach to characterisation. And, taken from the right angle, it permits the possibility of a happy ending after all. **ADAM NAYMAN**

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ADVERTORIAL

Olympus presents...

# Sharp Shooter

*Tony McGee has been there and done it. Be it boozy nights out with Bowie and Bono or studio jam sessions with Naomi Campbell, the Olympus photographer has spent the past four decades immortalising the otherworldly gravitas of musicians, models, film stars and the like.*

**Text: Niall Flynn - Photographer: Tony McGee**

Born in 1954, Tony McGee's fascination with photography began as a young boy, when, aged eight, he'd assume camera duties during family get-togethers. "It always had that wow factor," he explains. "Photography, to me, was magical."

At 16, he became a fashion photographer. By 17, he'd bagged his first *Vogue* cover. Throughout his career, he shot the likes of George Michael, Kate Moss, Tina Turner, Bryan Ferry and – most notably – David Bowie. His relationship with the latter resulted in some of the most iconic pictures taken of the late artist, from pre-show boxing in Brussels to 'David Bowie In His Time Tunnel', an image that immortalises the titular figure's cosmic brilliance.

To celebrate *In The Moment* – an exhibition that ran at London's ME Hotel – Tony sat down to share his journey and the things he's learned along the way.

## Shoot sharp

"Once I start, I shoot very little because when you work with famous people, they're encouraged if you're quick. I would advise any photographer: be quick, be organised. Take about six minutes to take that picture, no more. Make them feel confident – that you've got it in the can."

## Do your homework

"I always work with loud music; it creates something in their eyes that I cannot provoke any other way. I always research who I'm photographing and put something very emotional on – music that means something to them. Just do your homework; read up on their life. It can really be the turning point in a portrait session."

## Hone the sixth sense

"If you live in London, spend a week knowing where the sun is at any given moment. When a fashion editor is harassing you, 'Where are we doing the next three shots?', you say, 'Alright, Tower Bridge, Lambeth Bridge, Tate Gallery.' You say that because you know exactly where that sun is going to be and when it's working for you. We call that continuity. Have it in the bag."

## Learn the gift of the gab

"David Bowie is very, very dear to me. As long as you had something interesting to talk to him about, he was very easy. But he would absolutely skim his way through people who weren't interested in the beauty of life and the subject of art, books or music. David Bowie loved laughter, he loved constant conversation. He would say, 'You, me, over there, two hours.' I asked him, 'Why?' He said, 'No idea, let's have some tea, just talk.' He just loved it."

## Think on your feet

"When I first shot David, I was very, very young and David was very, very much a worldwide, iconic superstar. We were doing this promotion for the *Sound And Vision* tour at the Rainbow Theatre in Finsbury Park. The theatre had been shut down: it was empty, taken over by homeless men sleeping rough. When we arrived, nobody was in the place, but as the day got darker, I noticed a few of the homeless boys coming back in. I've got the camera and, at this point, there are about about 90 homeless men watching. David walks out and he's somewhat surprised at the audience. One of the guys shouts, 'Hey, you're not as good looking as you used to be!' and David says, 'And you – I didn't even recognise you.'

## Beat your heroes

"I would encourage any young photographer, male, female, whatever your background, to find a hero from the industry. Get them in your focus. Get their DNA very close to you. Work very hard to match them. Then, if they're still alive, get to meet them. Look at the shoes, the rings they wear, how human they really are. Therefore, this hero diminishes in size to become the same height as you. That's symbolic of where you've managed to move on from your hero – you've now become the photographer you always believed you would be."

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*Tony McGee on the OM-D E-M1 Mark II:*
*"An extraordinary camera that now allows a photographer or filmmaker to do almost anything you want with it, it is simply loaded with wonderful options and the glass that they fit to the front i.e. Zuiko lens is second to none. Delicious clarity and contrast with a very 'motion picture' like bokeh, it has now become my pride of place on my carry on bag for any international assignment"*

# Unsane

*Directed by*
**STEVEN SODERBERGH**
*Starring*
**CLAIRE FOY**
**JUNO TEMPLE**
**AIMEE MULLINS**
*Released*
**23 MARCH**

**4**

**ANTICIPATION.**
*A psychological horror from one of the American greats? Yes please.*

**3**

**ENJOYMENT.**
*The director appears to be having more fun than us.*

**2**

**IN RETROSPECT.**
*Soderbergh phones it in.*

On promotional duties for his 2017 comeback feature *Logan Lucky*, Steven Soderbergh proved slippery when it came to even acknowledging the existence of this new film, shot over ten days in June of that year. Headlines already abound dubbing *Unsane* his iPhone movie; the shrinking of high definition capture devices saw it shot and cut in the time it took Steven Spielberg to finish the Washington Post crossword. More exciting than any news of *Unsane*'s less-than-conventional technical toolkit is that it is the filmmaker's first venture into the realm of psychological horror. The film's trailer sells it as the claustrophobic progeny of Samuel Fuller's 1963 psych ward bombshell, *Shock Corridor*, and Roman Polanski's 1965 classic of female oppression, *Repulsion*. That's basically the conceit, even if *Unsane* can't bear the weight of comparison.

In the broadest sense, it's a familiar narrative, one that ought to serve as an opportunity for stylistic attack. It sees Claire Foy's depressed office drone accidentally sectioning herself in a sleepy private hospital. This is the result of intense trauma she has suffered at the hands of a stalker. We all know the tune – we're here for the virtuosic solos, especially with Soderbergh at the helm. Yet for all the fleetness of foot the lightweight camera affords, very little translates into visual showmanship. Soderbergh has always had a keen eye for off-kilter framing, and *Unsane* takes a certain wired energy from its skewed perspectives. One killer scene sees reverse-angle bodycams layered up in during one of Sawyer's freak outs, but it's a peak that arrives too early.

The film's problems begin and end with its screenplay, courtesy of Jonathan Bernstein and James Greer. Things begin interestingly enough, with seeds sown for an examination of the traumatic effects of male violence and intrusive insinuation. Sawyer receives much unwanted attention: her boss awkwardly hits on her; a male inmate on her inexplicably mixed ward cops a feel; a mental facility receptionist suffers the innuendos of an attendant cop. "Where's the outrage?" asks Sawyer of her doctor. Well, quite. Pulling at these thematic threads only serves to see them unravel.

Not that it would matter so much if the genre mechanics were on point, but even here Bernstein and Greer come unstuck. The set-up wants us to ask, 'Is Sawyer sane? Insane? Unsane?' A midway reveal cripplingly settles that question. Fair enough, if we can now move on to the business of escalation. The writing duo's propensity for what Larry David might call a 'stop 'n' chat' undermines Soderbergh's chances of cranking the narrative up a gear. By the time Sawyer mounts her fight back, any ambiguity of character or subtext is well and truly shot, and Soderbergh's formal ambition duly flounders.

If it's not all bad news, that's mostly down to a wholly and convincingly committed Foy. Soderbergh has some fun when a movie star pal turns up in a brief cameo to explain the logistics of stalker protectionism, advising Sawyer to keep off of social media. "Think of your cell phone as your enemy," gets a laugh, but you can decide for yourself who the joke's on.

**MATT THRIFT**

# The Square

*Directed by*
**RUBEN ÖSTLUND**
*Starring*
**CLAES BANG**
**ELISABETH MOSS**
**DOMINIC WEST**
*Released*
**16 MARCH**

**4**

**ANTICIPATION.**
*A sharp cast and* Force Majeure*'s director? Should be quite a show.*

**3**

**ENJOYMENT.**
*A hot contender for best performance by a leading primate.*

**3**

**IN RETROSPECT.**
*Gloriously cynical and delightfully slapstick – take from it what you will.*

When *The Square* won the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 2017, director Ruben Östlund leapt onto the stage with a boundless energy not seen since Tom Cruise met Oprah Winfrey's sofa. At one point, he instructed the press to turn their cameras to the crowd, and for the crowd to give out an almighty yell. Everyone did so obediently – the camera even panned to David Lynch joining in. It was a surreal, unruly moment at a ceremony identified for its unparalleled pomp and decorum, but perhaps entirely fitting given that *The Square* is itself a film comprised of bizarre non sequiturs.

Loosely based on his own experiences working in the art world, Östlund's fifth feature sees Claes Bang take on the role of Christian, a Stockholm gallery curator preparing for the debut of his latest acquisition, from which the film draws its title. It's difficult to say if we're supposed to sympathise with Christian, or regard him with a certain level of disgust. In one memorable scene, he offers to buy a homeless woman lunch, and when she responds with a precise request he seems confused, evidently expecting the woman to gratefully fall at his feet rather than ask him for a chicken panini without onions. Even so, Bang is well cast and likeable as the handsome buffoon around which the chaos revolves, from a harebrained scheme to retrieve his stolen phone and wallet, to trying (and failing) to mediate a rapidly unravelling Q&A with humourless artist Julian (Dominic West). He's joined by Elisabeth Moss as Anne, an American art critic, who seems fascinated and frustrated in equal measure by Christian's haplessness and immaturity.

At 151 minutes, this is a considerable investment – particularly given that so much of the runtime is dedicated to the mundane idiosyncrasies which make up a man's life. While its more surreal moments and bizarre slapstick sequences are often amusing, Östlund could probably do with a more ruthless editor – the pace often drags and threatens to decay into flat out directorial indulgence. Even so, it's hard not to admire Östlund's ambitious vision, and what seems to be a genuine, earnest desire to make a statement.

While positioned as a satire of the art world, the film actually functions more effectively as a damning indictment of the Western bourgeoisie, in particular the ambivalence and inertia which places the same incompetent, ineffectual individuals in positions of power by virtue of their social standing, rather than any capability or talent. Östlund posits that the art world is as corrupt and greedy as any other facet of society, but doesn't have much to say apart from this, which leaves a curious void at the film's core – there's no real weight to Östlund's statement, and as such it verges dangerously close to being an exercise in navel-gazing by a director who explored a similar level of male incompetence in 2014's *Force Majeure*.

Is *The Square* as clever as it thinks it is, or the ultimate product of unbridled male ego? The truth likely lies somewhere in between – but for anyone who has ever stood in a gallery squinting at a Pollock and thought, 'I reckon I could do that', it is a wry, cynical confirmation that yes, with the backing of a multi-billion-dollar industry... you probably could.

**HANNAH WOODHEAD**

# Beast

*Directed by*
**MICHAEL PEARCE**
*Starring*
**JESSIE BUCKLEY**
**JOHNNY FLYNN**
**TRYSTAN GRAVELLE**
*Released*
**27 APRIL**

**3**

**ANTICIPATION.**
*Not much to go on, but the premise looks intriguing.*

**4**

**ENJOYMENT.**
*Grisly and gorgeous in almost equal measure.*

**4**

**IN RETROSPECT.**
*A scenic spine-chiller bolstered by a magnificent leads.*

Not quite England and not quite France, the isle of Jersey occupies a unique space within Europe. While the picturesque idyll is primarily known for its temperate climate and history of cattle farming, in Michael Pearce's *Beast*, it takes on the sinister identity of a suffocating enclave in a strange state of social flux. As much a character as the people inhabit its sweeping coastlines and dark crevices, it provides an ethereal, eerie setting for first love and last rites. Jersey makes for a beguiling setting at once familiar and strange, the contrast between dreamy summer holiday spot and sparse wilderness highlighted through smart cinematography (c/o Benjamin Kracun). A sense of literal and metaphorical isolation – the suggestion that life on the island trickles rather than flows – renders *Beast* a drama that meanders slowly but purposefully towards its agonising conclusion.

Turning to more human characters, *Beast* presents audiences with Moll (Jessie Buckley), a troubled young woman struggling under the iron grip of her controlling mother. Slight and fearful with wide brown eyes, she goes about the summer with a restrained longing, working as a coach tour guide by day, and battling familial tensions with her parents and siblings at night. The catalyst for change in her stagnant life is the appearance of Pascal (Johnny Flynn), a rough, mysterious loner who Moll finds herself drawn to despite the distain of her family and the wider community.

While puppy love unfolds between Moll and Pascal, a murderer is on the loose, preying on the island's teenage girls. As tensions begin to flare and accusations stack up, Moll is forced to confront the very real possibility that her new beau is not all he claims to be – and more worryingly, the uneasy thought that she might not care. On the surface, Pearce's film sounds like a fairly conventional bad-boy-meets-good-girl-chaos-ensues romp, along the lines of *Badlands* or *Natural Born Killers*, but there is so much more buried beneath the topsoil, waiting to be unearthed.

The relationship between Moll and Pascal, whilst central, is by no means the film's heart. This instead belongs to the performance given by the astonishingly good Buckley, who pivots from morose vulnerability to snarling rage in a moment's notice. Her wide-eyed candour is captivating, but it's the subtlety with which she reveals Moll's spiralling descent into darkness that really resonates. Meanwhile Flynn provides an intriguing foil as Pascal, an eratic, mysterious presence whose primary method of communication is a loaded stare or a knowing a grin. Two outsiders in a close-knit community, Moll and Pascal are quick to set themselves up together against the world, but there's always a creeping sense that their *folie à deux* can't last forever.

*Beast* is an accomplished debut feature for Michael Pearce, who for the most part manages to bring fresh ideas and characters to the established sub-genre of romance-tinged thrillers. The only real misstep is an ending that feels altogether too tidy given the film's frayed edges, but there lurks a sense of breathstealing unease even within its final frame.

**HANNAH WOODHEAD**

*Interview by* **HANNAH WOODHEAD** *Illustration by* **MONICA BARENGO**

# Jessie Buckley

**A starmaking turn in *Beast* is set to launch Irish actor Jessie Buckley into the stratosphere.**

Michael Pearce's *Beast* is a dark romance set on the mysterious isle of Jersey. It is a film that subverts expectations – and at the heart of it all is star-on-the-rise Jessie Buckley, who delivers a mesmerising turn as Moll, a young woman who finds herself in a difficult situation when she falls for the black sheep of her community.

**LWLies: As someone who trained as a musician before acting, do you find yourself drawn to one over the other?** Buckley: I've actually just finished a film called *Country Music*, which is about a girl who comes out of prison in Glasgow and wants to be a country music singer. So I've got the best of both worlds! I'm having a great time.

**Do you think you'll ever go back to musicals?** I don't know what I'm going to do. I kind of choose things if I feel I've got the time and whether it's going to be fun, and what I'll learn from it.

**What did you learn from making *Beast*?** I learned that intimacy that you create on set is crucial to adding the heart into a film. Your vision is the key, until somebody else comes in and says, 'Why don't you try things over in my corner for a bit?' That's the only way storytelling can evolve. When we were making *Beast* we were like a big family, and it encouraged us to take risks and go beyond what was there in front of us on the page. I felt completely surprised by that, and learned no matter what, filmmaking is about holding onto the relationships and dialogue that you create on set. Oh god, I'm waffling on...

**No! It's refreshing to get the interpretation of an actor who's been there and lived through it.** What did you take away from it?

**I felt in some ways it was familiar but at the same time quite new and different – in the same way Jersey seems so close and so distant at the same time to Great Britain.** Yeah, it's a beautiful but weird place. I remember going for the first time with Johnny (Flynn) and Michael (Pearce) and it's so elemental. You're surrounded by this quite emotional feeling. The landscape is quite epic but it's incredibly conservative. We had someone from the government measuring the height of hedges every week. There's also a dark underworld as well where there's all these disused German bunkers from World War Two. It's like nowhere I'd ever been before, and Jersey itself is a huge character in the film.

**What drew you to the part of Moll?** I was finishing filming another project, and I read 20 pages of the script, and I just had a kind of guttural reaction to it. Moll is so complex and her story has such a unique voice and vision. She's this person who is numb and trying to atone for a crime that she committed when she was 13, knowing that she has these dark shadows within her. It isn't until she falls in love that she starts to engage with her vulnerability and grow by acknowledging it. In the end you don't know where she's going to go, but you know she'll never want to go back to where she was before.

**It's interesting to see a film like this from a woman's perspective, that deals with the difficulty of being in love, and fighting against what you want to believe is true and what is actually true.** That's an interesting thing as well – the seed of beastliness is inherent in all of us, but we can all hopefully keep a lid on it. Where does Moll's beastliness come from, and where does it begin and end? Does it begin with her mother, does it begin with Pascal, or is it inherent in her? Is it the place that she's living? That was one thread which constantly kept me curious.

**I think for women especially, we're cowed from a young age into being well behaved, and if you in any way threaten to be a bit different you get this sort of visceral reaction. For me, seeing someone like Moll was quite freeing.** Yeah, and I think audiences' reactions to stories are very much affected by what's going on around them, and that affects how we watch this story. Women at the moment are waking up from being numb in a way. So maybe it means that they can watch films like *Beast* and see the way people are remoulding themselves and being reborn into something bigger and powerful

# Wonderstruck

*Directed by*
**TODD HAYNES**
*Starring*
**OAKES FEGLEY**
**JULIANNE MOORE**
**MILLICENT SIMMONDS**
*Released*
**6 APRIL**

**4**

**ANTICIPATION.**
*Todd Haynes and Julianne Moore reunited!*

**3**

**ENJOYMENT.**
*Elegantly mounted, but also twee and mawkish.*

**3**

**IN RETROSPECT.**
*A curator's egg.*

"You really do live in a museum," complains single mother Elaine (Michelle Williams) to her son Ben (Oakes Fegley), whose bedroom is festooned with the souvenirs, mementoes and detritus that he has curated over the 12 years of his life. Museums form key locations in Todd Haynes' *Wonderstruck*, which lets its two quest narratives, set 50 years apart, unfold in cross-cutting parallel until they eventually merge into a single, complex cabinet of curiosities whose disparate exhibits all suddenly seem intimately interconnected. This is a film which offers the world in microcosm, and a cityscape filled with secrets and personal histories, so that all of New York City is revealed to be one giant, awe-inspiring museum where everyone, even if they do not quite realise it, belongs.

In 1927, at the dawn of the "talkies", young, profoundly deaf Rose (Millicent Simmonds) runs away to New York City in search of the silent-screen star Lillian Mayhew (Julianne Moore). In 1977, with his recently deceased mother now just another of his collected memories, young Ben, also deaf after being struck by lightning, runs away to New York in search of the father he never knew. Brian Selznick's original 2011 novel tells Rose's story in pictures and Ben's in words. For his film, Haynes deploys the monochrome presentation and stylistic techniques of a silent film for Rose's adventures, while revealing Ben's in vibrant '70s colour, occasionally accompanied by the same jazz-funk instrumental (Eumir Deodato's '2001: Also Sprach Zarathustra') to which, two years later, Chauncey Gardner would emerge wide-eyed into New York in Hal Ashby's *Being There*. The implication of this intertextuality is that Rose's and Ben's stories are just two of eight million in the Naked City, all linked through a warm, fuzzy humanity.

The result is something of a curate's – or curator's – egg. *Wonderstruck* posits an absurdly benign view of old New York (where the only predator is a purse snatcher). But perhaps this, as well as the stories' retro timeframes, is to suggest that the film itself is an idealised museum piece, like the natural history diorama that stops Ben in his tracks. It is difficult to escape the impression that what attracted Haynes to this project is the challenge of recreating not just one but two period Big Apples – plus a mannered stop-motion third once his two worlds have collided.

This is all executed with real verve, showcasing a range of filmmaking styles and all at the service of a sweeping, even cosmic, story. Yet it also, despite the many emotions on display, feels a bit stuffy and soulless at times. Arranged within the film's structure there is another silent movie, a book about museums (itself called 'Wonderstruck'), sketches, exhibits, models and handwritten notes (which serve as 'intertitles' for the hearing-impaired characters). But all these clever, multiple-media layerings are not enough to prevent *Wonderstruck* ultimately privileging the word over the image, and relying excessively on its deafening verbal exposition.

**ANTON BITEL**

# Thoroughbreds

*Directed by*
**CORY FINLEY**
*Starring*
**ANYA TAYLOR-JOY**
**OLIVIA COOKE**
**ANTON YELCHIN**
*Released*
**6 APRIL**

**3**

**ANTICIPATION.**
*A Sundance hit doesn't always mean much to the home crowd.*

**4**

**ENJOYMENT.**
*Two stunning lead performances power this macabre study of entitlement and boredom.*

**4**

**IN RETROSPECT.**
*Remember the name Corey Finley This fellow will go far.*

Hollywood doesn't really do nasty. On the rare occasions it does, there's always some handy switch-back, or last minute reprieve or redemption or moralistic salve to help alleviate any potential suffering on the part of the viewer. Perhaps this is why Michael Haneke's American remake of his own *Funny Games*, a scathingly ironic satire on the seductive nature of screen violence, crashed and burned. We like to see people torching insects with a well-placed magnifying glass, but we need to learn why they're an awful person for doing so. Yet you spend the length of Cory Finley's *Thoroughbreds* watching as the plane plummets into the ravine, waiting, waiting, waiting for it to pull up and for everyone on board to be saved. And it simply refuses to go there.

In Connecticut's frou-frou suburban nirvana of stucco mansions, gas barbecues and dads who play extreme sports, something wicked is brewing. Anya Taylor-Joy's Lily has been asked to give Olivia Cooke's Amanda some private tuition, and from the off there's a cut-glass tension between the terrible twosome. The former is a prim, disillusioned queen bee who is suffering at the hands of her meddling, energy shake-chugging step father and cowering doormat mother. The latter is a socially maladjusted 'trouble student' who made something of a name for herself when she, err, went a bit mad and butchered a racehorse. Scaberous dialogue exchanges are the lifeblood of their initial meetings, though neither party is willing to give in to the other. Soon they realise that perhaps there's a dark connection drawing them closer, and that they could do some real damage if they put their heads together. Debutant writer/director Finley offers few sentimental concessions to his Wednesday Addams-like leads, and we only remain on their side by dint of the satellite characters being even more venal and revolting.

When a casual decision is made to plot a murder, it barely raises an eyebrow, as these women appear not only born to kill, but also born to get away with it. Anton Yelchin's Tim is their patsy, a burnout drug dealer who is convinced that big-time prosperity is but a hop and skip away. Desperate to assert his faux macho posturing over the younger women, they play him for the schmuck he is in order to see through their own dastardly scheme. Finley never overtly states his themes, despite the fact that the film appears as a broad critique of the unchecked power wielded by the more affluent among us. When you have everything, it's difficult to know what more you could want, and so *Thoroughbreds* suggests that desire starts to naturally creep towards deeply anti-social terrain. Taylor-Joy and Cooke make for a cosy match, both convincingly lost in the moral tundra and unwilling to mope about the fact. The flat compositions within Lily's gigantic home (where much of the film takes place) makes it look immaculately tidy to the point that noone actually lives there. A massive amount of space reveals no material trinkets to offer signs of human life. Like *Funny Games,* this might prove too barbaric to connect with a broad audience, but as a glassy-eyed shocker with true crime trappings, it goes down a chilly treat. **DAVID JENKINS**

*Interview by* **DAVID JENKINS** *Illustration by* **MONICA BARENGO**

# Anya Taylor-Joy and Olivia Cooke

## The stars of Cory Finley's venomous chamber comedy, *Thoroughbreds*, talk about the process of playing nasty.

When you've listened to all the music, made all the friends, own all the gizmos and have all the money in the world, what's left in the world to do but murder people for sport? Corey Finley's debut feature *Thoroughbreds* stars Olivia Cooke and Anya Taylor-Joy as Amanda and Lily, two disenchanted Connecticut teens looking for some kind of release from their humdrum existence. We met the pair to talk about building characters and hopping between movies without a break.

**LWLies: Could you describe the first time you guys met?**

Cooke: We met in Cohasset in Boston, at the hotel. We went for lunch. Do you remember? In the sandwich shop?

Taylor-Joy: Yes, yes, and we spent the whole night talking and drinking wine and being ourselves for the last time. We had no time on this movie so we just went straight into doing the dialogue. I think there are certain moments when we're dealing with so many complex emotions that we'd go up to each other and be like, 'Please run the lines with me!'

OC: It was quite an insidious atmosphere.

ATJ: Yeah it was. I think the thing that you feel really happy about is that you know you're working with someone who's going to not just protect you, but protect your performance. It makes me bring my A-game every single day. I feel like I can't slack in the slightest because I've got to hit her with exactly the amount of force that she's hitting me.

OC: It feels like sport. Like a tennis match. Especially the way it's written. We were exhausted by the end of each day.

ATJ: And the takes were so long. We were discussing this earlier: neither of us ever gets a break because when the camera's on Olivia, I'm behind the camera and I'm delivering the dialogue at the same level, and when the camera's on me, she's doing the same. Then we do the master shots and the takes are all six minutes long. So if one of you drops a line you have to go back to the beginning and you go through the entire emotional range again.

**It's shocked to hear that you went straight into it.**

ATJ: We had to!

**You'd imagine there would be auditions and rehearsals beforehand.**

OC: No, we both went into it very blind. Thank god it worked.

**Are you ever sceptical about playing unlikable or antisocial characters?**

ATJ: Shut me up if this isn't the way you feel about it, but I think, when you really love what you do, you relish those kind of roles where you have to do something different. I love to do something that I've not done before. The envelope is so pushed in terms of the way that they are themselves – it just feels like a bit of fun.

OC: Yeah! They're having fun with each other. I think it's out of malice, but it's also because they are both privileged and bored.

ATJ: And lonely too. Even though they won't admit it, even when they are together and they are being horrible to one another, at least they are together. It gives them something to fight against.

**Do you find that different actors have favourite types of role? Do you have a kind or type of person, you gravitate towards?**

OC: D'you know, I think if they are complex in their own right then immediately they are very interesting. But also you don't really know if it's going to be that enjoyable until you get on set and there are all these different elements that go into it. Like the crew, the director, the actors. I've done some movies or some jobs that haven't turned out to be the best, but I've had the most amazing time doing them, so looking back it's just heaven.

ATJ: Yeah, it's just a good life thing, rather than a good career thing. When I was younger I always thought I wanted to play someone who is very difficult to like. If you are playing someone who is unpleasant you have to work that much harder to get the audience not necessarily on your side but to convince them to come on that journey with you. If that person is out-and-out awful and there's not something about them that's engaging and you don't care, you think: this person is a bitch and I don't want to watch them anymore. I think it's challenging to stay true to the character, but also to be engaging enough that people want to know what's happening. Lily and Amanda are both such complex human beings that it would be like everyday we would go in and just be like, 'Okay, how do we play such complex characters' and make them watchable, 'how do we do this...?'

# Ghost Stories

*Directed by*
**JEREMY DYSON**
**ANDY NYMAN**
*Starring*
**MARTIN FREEMAN**
**ANDY NYMAN**
**PAUL WHITEHOUSE**
*Released*
**6 APRIL**

**4**

**ANTICIPATION.**
*We've heard good things about the play.*

**4**

**ENJOYMENT.**
*Spooky and emotionally engaging.*

**4**

**IN RETROSPECT.**
*A potent blend of personal and political that's genuinely haunting.*

Through the eyes of four men from very different walks of life, co-writers and directors Andy Nyman and Jeremy Dyson take us on a guided tour of bottled-up male anguish and a crumbling British society. This unnerving compendium has made the transition from a successful international stage show (whose fanbase includes the director John Landis) to the big screen and draws inspiration from a rich history of horror, recalling the chilling and nightmarish quality of films including the Amicus anthologies and 1945 portmanteau, *Dead of Night*.

Nyman plays our pragmatic guide through three separate supernatural tales, Professor Goodman, an acadmic who has devoted his life to debunking myths and taking down fraudulent psychics. We first meet the adult Goodman snatching away comfort from a grieving mother at a live clairvoyant show – and with that the film begins its line of enquiry into confronting harsh truths and challenging beliefs. Goodman is taken on a mysterious journey to a caravan park on the coast, where he is sent on a mission to solve a series of inexplicable hauntings. The howling wind of the off-season English shore is a cold and lonely place and provides a startling and fitting location to trawl through themes of isolation, grief and guilt.

Paul Whitehouse turns in a performance that is part nasty and part sympathetic as bitter, working-class widower Tony Matthews. Goodman meets Tony in a deserted, musty pub where he sinks down a short and a pint and casts his memory back to the time when he worked as a night watchman in an abandoned asylum for women.

Next up is a disturbed young man named Simon Rifkind (Alex Lawther) who is still living at home with his parents. He's distraught at what he is convinced was an encounter with the devil years previously. His bedroom walls are a shrine to the hoofed beast aside from a cheerful snap of Sooty and Sweep. There's humour among all the tragedy but Dyson and Nyman don't overplay it. The camera is continually poked into Lawther's pained expressions as he contorts his face under spooky red lights and the darkness of winding country lanes. Lawther's face in these unbearably tense scenes resembles Maxwell Frere's ventriloquist's dummy in *Dead of Night* and also brings to mind Michael Redgrave's affecting performance in the same film. Finally, Goodman convenes with flat-cap wearing businessman, Mike Priddle (Martin Freeman) in a vast, empty field where he is desperately searching for his hunting rifle.

All the male characters who features in *Ghost Stories* are haunted by terrible misfortune that has morphed into an accute sense of panic and self-loathing. Dyson and Nyman have stated there are some personal demons in the film and, as they look back to the late 1970s and their youth, they also cannily transfer a bleak mood of societal and private discontent to the present day. They explore uncomfortable topics such as racism, recession, mental health and troubling personal beliefs in a truly unnerving way, but also deliver huge emotional heft by imbuing in their characters with a convincing vulnerability.

**KATHERINE MCLAUGHLIN**

# Mary and the Witch's Flower

*Directed by*
**HIROMASA YONEBAYASHI**
*Starring*
**RUBY BARNHILL**
**KATE WINSLET**
**JIM BROADBENT**
*Released*
**4 MAY**

**4**

**ANTICIPATION.**
*Two Studio Ghibli veterans start out on their own – a fresh take or same old same old?*

**3**

**ENJOYMENT.**
*The fantasy surroundings are more fully realised than the characters, though it's all rooted in classic children's literature.*

**3**

**IN RETROSPECT.**
*Still working the Miyazaki playbook, if not quite with the maestro's level of expertise.*

With Japanese anime powerhouse Studio Ghibli having announced the end of an era, the producer/director team previously responsible for their striking teenage ghost story *When Marnie Was There* wisely decided to take their leave and set up their own anime operation. As with *Marnie* and Hirosma Yonebayashi's debut feature *Arrietty,* the source is once more a highly-regarded English novel for children, Mary Stewart's 'The Little Broomstick' – which Disney nearly adopted in the early 1980s. With its tale of a young girl rather surprised to find herself a star pupil at an exclusive academy for trainee witches, many viewers will feel there's more than a hint of Hogwarts in the air, but since Stewart's story dates from 1971, the chain of influence might possibly be running in the opposite direction.

Either way, the opening sequence is knockout stuff, with a young lass nabbing a potent cutting of so-called witch's flower from an exploding castle that's seemingly some evil genius' hideout. Alas, the girl's broomstick-riding skills let her down as she makes her escape, crashing to earth in what looks like some leafy corner of England. Things settle down after this pulsating prologue as we spend time with teenager Mary, who (in time-honoured Ghibli fashion) has been packed off to the sticks for the summer hols while her folks are at work. She's bored, bored, bored in the countryside around her elderly aunt's big house, and though we know she's surely due for a fantastical adventure, what restless red-head Mary really wants is to find some purpose in her life.

Which is why in story terms she's so susceptible to the surprising turn in store. No, it's not that she finds herself in the alternate reality of Endor College, seat of learning for all things witchy, where her seemingly innate gift for sorcery makes her the new favourite of scary head mistress Madame Mumblechook. We almost expected as much. The real surprise is that Endor's spells and potions work in concert with scientific experimentation, driven by a thirst for power that's left a trail of failed animal experiments in its wake. This is the serious moral enquiry of HG Wells' 'The Island of Dr Moreau' and a world away from the current genre truisms where magical potency is often a positive route towards teenage self-realisation.

It's cheering to see such ambition at play, though neither the slightly underwritten protagonists or mono-dimensional villains are rich enough to give the intriguing themes much narrative traction. Still, Yonebayashi whips the action scenes along, and does an eye-catching job with the slightly sinister wonderland that is Endor College. Plenty of echoes at this stage of previous Ghibli offerings, from the perky airborne young witch in *Kiki's Delivery Service* to the powerful grande dame antagonist of *Spirited Away,* though the terrific English dub, which gives the voice cast dialogue they can really get stuck into, is as good or better than anything else in the Ghibli catalogue. Overall, Studio Ponoc's first outing doesn't quite add up to a classic, but there's enough quality on display that fans and neophytes alike should still be reasonably satisfied. **TREVOR JOHNSTON**

## Here to Be Heard: The Story of the Slits

*Directed by* **WILLIAM E BADGLEY**
*Released* **23 MARCH**

In 1976, drummer Paloma Romero – better known as Palmolive – had had enouhgh of the racist, bigoted shtick of then bandmate Sid Vicious. She peaced out of The Flowers of Romance, with guitarist Viv Albertine in tow, and set about forming the world's first all-girl punk group. Only, The Slits' incendiary story has largely been redacted from pop culture's chronicles – so says New York University's professor of punk and reggae, Vivien Goldman, in this edifying documentary.

*Here to Be Heard* summons punk's first feminist firecrackers: Romero, Albertine, bassist Tessa Pollitt and potent frontperson Ari Up. This self-made sorority sought to claim space, choice and new ways of being women, in step with second-wave feminism. Unsurprisingly, the era's news media were mostly repulsed by the band's perceived 'antics', criticising their rejection of conservative, middle-class, patriarchal values on the eve of Thatcher's Britain. With an archivist's eye and adopting a progressive vantage, director William E Badgley jigsaws The Slits' legacy back together. Present-day Tessa leafs through her Slits scrapbook, charting the band's trajectory from opening for The Clash to jumpstarting the 'riot grrrl' epoch. Talking head interviews with the group's key players and notable punk historians are candid and carefree, as is the film's overall execution. The DIY spirit of punk is alive in the imperfect production values, which are suitably endearing until the (remarkable) dialogue is muffled by music and/or poor recording conditions. Nonetheless, the film succeeds in its exploration of subculture, individuality and collective identity, from a feminist perspective.

To get this long-awaited doc over the line, Badgley ran a Kickstarter campaign in 2015. He'd already been working on the film for two years with executive producer Jennifer Shagawat, a pal of the band who ensured *Here to Be Heard* would reflect the last wishes of the late Ari Up, who passed away in 2010. **AIMEE KNIGHT**

**ANTICIPATION.** *This one's been a long time coming, so to speak.* **4**

**ENJOYMENT.** *The confused politics of (some) '70s feminists has not aged well.* **3**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *Tribute finally paid to our nasty foremothers.* **3**

## The Wound

*Directed by* **JOHN TRENGOVE**
*Starring* **NAKHANE TOURÉ, BONGILE MANTSAI, NIZA JAY NCOYINI**
*Released* **27 APRIL**

An imposing undercurrent of portent, of grand repercussions stemming from quiet beginnings, is apparent from the off in John Trengove's delicate film about youth and sexuality. As Xolani, Nakhane Touré plays a caregiver for the young men attending a South African initiation who is forced to keep his sexual orientation under wraps.

No-frills camerawork and sparse, ambient sound design add to the air of insularity endured by Xolani. Forced to hide from the conservatism of his peers, his assignations with Bongile Mantsai's Vija seem a well-kept secret until the arrival of Niza Jay Ncoyini's city-boy Kwanda. Seeing through their act, Kwanda comes under Xolani's care as he sets upon the path to manhood, all the while posing a threat to the security of all three men.

Within this unassuming technical framework it falls upon the actors to carry the film. Thankfully, all excel in their approach to portraying the disparate attitudes of these three embattled individuals. Touré in particular offers a beautifully understated performance that, from the first tortured look slipped past Kwanda's father when he recognises himself in the stories of the man's repressed son, reveals all he has been pressured to withhold. Mantsai's portrayal of a man at war with his own sexuality perfectly explores the need to mask the truth with classical 'butch' masculinity, as well as the correlations between sex, power and control.

That said, one major misstep occurs in its final moments. An uncharacteristic show of aggression comes close to undermining the subtlety of all that came before. It's a shame given the nuance on show elsewhere, though the insights demonstrated throughout easily provide enough reason to overlook this misjudged ending. **JOE BODEN**

**ANTICIPATION.** *An unfamiliar approach to a weathered formula and Nakhane Touré's first performance intrigue.* **4**

**ENJOYMENT.** *Touré shines as the repressed Xolani in a film that refuses to deal with the purely superficial.* **4**

**IN RETROSPECT.** *A jarring conclusion sours what would an otherwise superb offering.* **4**

# I Got Life!

*Directed by* **BLANDINE LENOIR**
*Starring* **AGNÈS JAOUI, THIBAULT DE MONTALEMBERT, PASCALE ARBILLOT**
*Released* **23 MARCH**

Most normal people don't have the time or resources to instigate a class action lawsuit against ageist employers, or to take down businesses which discriminate against their more mature employees. Sometimes, the only option is to roll with the humiliations and hope things all ends as well as they can. In *I Got Life!*, Agnès Jaoui slinks comfortably into the role of menopausal matriarch Aurore, a divorced parent-of-two who appears to be in the midst of a mid-life crisis foisted upon her by powers that are beyond her control and understanding.

She forces a smile when the upstart proprietor of the cafe in which she works as a waitress imposes a set of awkward new rules. And she attempts to retain her cool when bumping into her ex and his younger new squeeze while viewing an apartment. When the chips are down, a new addition to the family is announced and Aurore must rationalise her future. Actor-turned-director Blandine Lenoir plays this light comic tale of existential crisis with an admirably straight bat, opting not to force through a strict narrative arc and instead resting on a loose structure which collects together short episodes and interludes. Jaoui, a seasoned performer and director whose own droll character studies are not too dissimilar to this, features in nearly every scene and appears extremely comfortable to switch from the concerned friend to the protective mother to the spurned lover and the scorned wage slave and back again. The awkward title is purloined from a Nina Simone lyric, as there's a sequence where Aurore partakes in a fantasy dance party with a pair of toddlers. It's not a film which strives to offer any finite answer to questions about finding comfort in those twilight years. Yet its warm and open-hearted depiction of a woman on the verge helps to power it through to a satisfactory, if not life-altering close.

**DAVID JENKINS**

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|---|---|
| **ANTICIPATION.** *Always nice to see what the great Agnès Jaoui is up to.* | 3 |
| **ENJOYMENT.** *Light, funny, sad and touching, without doing anything particulary new or exciting.* | 3 |
| **IN RETROSPECT.** *Ride off of an enjoyable lead performance and some charming comic writing.* | 3 |

# Entebbe

*Directed by* **JOSÉ PADILHA**
*Starring* **ROSAMUND PIKE, DANIEL BRÜHL, EDDIE MARSAN**
*Released* **6 APRIL**

There's a scene towards the end of this retro-styled political thriller from José "RoboCop (2014)" Padilha where Rosamund Pike's German freedom fighter dials up her distant lover from a payphone in a Ugandan airport terminal. The setting is Entebbe, 1976, and as she issues a weary yet defiant *auf wiedersehen* down the receiver, you can feel the weight of history bearing down on her. Then, in a twist that wouldn't feel out of place in a Two Ronnies sketch, Padilha and screenwriter Gregory Burke torpedo the emotional centre of their movie by having a kindly airport security guard inform Pike's character that the telephone she's using – the one she's just poured her heart out into for two straight minutes – is out of service, but she's welcome to try again from the bank of phones over in that corner.

It's a baffling moment and evidence in microcosm of the film's basic futility. Because while *Entebbe* is a competently told dramatisation of the audacious hijacking of an Air France flight and the even more audacious rescue mission that followed, the wider significance of this true story is never really explored. The film operates chiefly as a character piece: on the one side is a group of left-wing radicals fronted by Brigitte Kuhlmann (Pike) and Wilfried Böse (Daniel Brühl); on the other sits Israel's top brass including Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (Lior Ashkenazi) and Defence Minister Shimon Peres (Eddie Marsan, late for his *The Death of Stalin* audition); and in the middle Nonso Anozie emphatically steals the show as Uganda's chuckly despot Idi Amin. Owing to the highly sensitive and ongoing nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it's perhaps understandable that Padilha reconstructs this controversial incident without comment. As a result, though, it feels like an opportunity missed.

**ADAM WOODWARD**

| | |
|---|---|
| **ANTICIPATION.** *A dramatic episode in a decades old conflict.* | 3 |
| **ENJOYMENT.** *Decent performances all round, but doesn't have much to say.* | 3 |
| **IN RETROSPECT.** *Like the hijacking itself, you can't help feeling it was all for nothing.* | 2 |

# 120 Beats Per Minute

*Directed by*
**ROBIN CAMPILLO**
*Starring*
**NAHUEL PÉREZ BISCAYART**
**ARNAUD VALOIS**
**ADÈLE HAENEL**
*Released*
**6 APRIL**

**4**

**ANTICIPATION.**
*One of the highlights of the 2017 Cannes Film Festival.*

**4**

**ENJOYMENT.**
*Every frame bursts with energy and emotion.*

**4**

**IN RETROSPECT.**
*A political drama with a stealthy subtext on death and friendship. What's not to like?*

The story of a marginalised social group fighting to extract the means to survive against an indifferent establishment is nothing new. Yet what gives Robin Campillo's 1990s-set *120 Beats Per Minute* a compelling heft is its thoroughness. It is a dramatised slice of social history that runs on procedural details. Lesser films reduce such schemes to cliché and montage. You leave this film knowing how to make a bathful of fake blood, and how best to vandalise the offices of negligent pharmaceutical companies.

The central location is the cosy lecture theatre where the Paris chapter of non-violent AIDS activist group Act Up conduct their weekly meetings. Campillo plunges us straight into the refined conflicts taking place within the organisation. Sophie (Adèle Haenel) is sickened that a recent stunt led to an unplanned fake blood attack and a target being handcuffed. Sean (Nahuel Pérez Biscayart) is unrepentant. He is aflame with the radical energy of one who doesn't have long to live. Other voices chime in, each with a slightly different angle, many existing against the ticking clock of a plummeting T4 blood cell count. The director feeds in tragic backstories with the most discreet of touches, never wringing sentiment and always pushing group dynamics to the fore.

The film begins as a batch of four newcomers are welcomed into the fold. Among them is Nathan (Arnaud Valois) who soon becomes entangled with Sean. Their relationship is not separate to their activism. Sean is, in his words, "poz", and intimacies cannot be separate this medical fact of life, just as pressurising pharma companies for meds is integral to it.

Campillo, in his capacity as scriptwriter, has a clear-eyed focus that streamlines all scenes so that each adds a dimension or nuance to life as an HIV-positive member of Act Up. Sex without a condom is Nathan's preference, but that's not an option. A bedroom scene – elegantly composed from wide close-ups of faces, flesh, and hands caressing curves – is the stage for new lovers catching up on who each other has been to date, but even in this private cocoon, the defining conversation is about how they, as gay men, have survived.

This is a Serious Movie that engages the intellect with compelling depictions of place, time and people. The ensemble cast is full of small characters with personalities that reveal themselves through political quirks and related creativity. A tiny character, Mehdi, comes alive through his chant idea, "Molecules for anal sex fools!" Irreverent humour isn't pressed but does crop up as a symptom of placing ideals ahead of sentimentality. One character wants his ashes to be thrown at insurers. In the wake of this event, a serious business discussion ensues regarding how much of the ashes goes on the insurers, and how much to his mother.

Death is the unwelcome guest hanging over well-run meetings and inching its shadow across this well-crafted film. Act Up is in constant flux because membership are constantly dying. Initially, Campillo handles the Reaper's presence with stoicism, but eventually gives it time to dance centre stage. While this section of the film is more conventional than what came before, he embeds a handful of striking images, deeds and lines of dialogue which leave a lingering feeling that one has witnessed something real and important. **SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN**

*Words by* **MANUELA LAZIC** *Illustration by* **MONICA BARENGO**

# Robin Campillo

## The Moroccan-born French director recalls the excitement of being a member of Act Up.

The Parisian chapter of Act Up – a roistering anti-AIDS activist organisation – is the subject of *120 Beats Per Minute,* the new film from writer/director Robin Campillo and the follow-up to his lauded inter-generational gay drama, *Eastern Boys*.

**LWLies: In both your previous film, *Eastern Boys* and *BPM*, there's a real devotion from the actors.** Campillo: It's because I trust them immensely. I spend a long time on casting. For me, it's key, because there's a moment when I forget the characters I've written and become more interested in the actors. I try to go towards them as much as they go towards me. Because they know they're being observed for who they really are, they can be a lot more generous with me.

**I think we see a lot of the actors' personalities in the film, in particular Nahuel Pérez Biscayart's, who plays Sean.** There's something very interesting about the contrast between Sean and Nathan. Sean looks at himself act. The debate scenes could have been really unpleasant. There needed to be some play, some feelings much more troubled than just the indignation of the activists, because the film also talks about the relation to the disease. Sean has this rhetorical intelligence between himself and the illness, but he loses it when the illness overpowers him. When he checks into hospital, Nahuel and I made a pact that he'd stop over-acting. It's complicated for baroque actors because they have this amazing complicity with their public. Nahuel accepted that challenge, and facing him was Arnaud Vallois [playing Nathan], who doesn't look at himself acting at all, and that's fascinating too, and so rare. I find the ensemble very shimmering, so pleasing to watch.

**The film has so many different acting styles, yet they all work together, like in life.** There's a problem in cinema: we want everything to be absolutely always coherent. After 15 minutes we want the entire aesthetic curriculum for the whole movie. I used to be paranoid about the cast and crew being obstacles to my vision. But I reversed that with *Eastern Boys* and decided that they would suggest better things than what I'd imagined. Now I bet everything on actors and locations. Maybe I'm pretentious, but the rest, I know how to do now. Especially on a film about the idea of embodiment – of a political fight, of the illness– actors are crucial. I think now, I could almost make a film without a script, if I had the right actors.

**Your films often contain debate scenes, which aren't usually thought of as cinematic.** Those scenes are like people forming a thinking brain haunted by images from the outside. They're almost seances of spiritualism, where people judge and try to make happen reality, but reality is also like an hallucination. In the first meeting, the images haunting the scene are those of this protest that some consider too violent, and Sean, with his rhetorical agility, manages to change perceptions. But at his last meeting, the images are those of the illness and he loses control. I love filming the voice at work, the voice that produces. I love to film things that seem impure in cinema, like those meetings. But there's also a scene with a dead character and his body stays in an apartment for so long. We never see that in films, even though it's so concrete and, to me, fascinating. I think I could tell the bleakest stories, they would still have some kind of enchanted air.

**What I also find so realistic is the characters' sense of humour.** When I joined Act Up in 1992, I found an extremely jubilant group. The very gay self-mockery connected with my interest in showing a group aware of its weaknesses. Because we had so many failed protests! There was also something surreal to these demonstrations, like the haemophiliac boy making fake blood in his mother's bathtub, which really happened. This humour and surrealism meant that these people were dreaming politics as *mise-en-scene*. That's why this specific subject was more cinematic than other AIDS-related topics, which often make for societal, absolutely terrifying movies. I liked this distanciation through humour

# Mary Magdalene

*Directed by*
**GARTH DAVIS**
*Starring*
**ROONEY MARA**
**JOAQUIN PHOENIX**
**CHIWETEL EJIOFOR**
*Released*
**16 MARCH**

**3**

**ANTICIPATION.**
*A Hollywood movie about a biblical character seems like a rather strange project, and not in a good way.*

**3**

**ENJOYMENT.**
*Pleasant to look at, but never particularly thrilling. Not exactly feminist, either.*

**3**

**IN RETROSPECT.**
*Watch Pasolini's* The Gospel According to St Matthew *instead.*

Unless explicitly targeted at the religious audiences who have turned the faith-driven *God's Not Dead* series into a profitable franchise, films about biblical figures typically have to rely on more than just their storyline to seduce secular audiences. Sure enough, as suggested by the tagline, 'Her story will be told,' Garth Davis' *Mary Magdalene* promises to give a voice to a character from the life of Jesus who is often ignored in favour of more famous male apostles and Christ himself. After all, Mary Magdalene was the first person to see Christ resurrected, and thus might deserve a film of her own.

Because the details of her life are largely unknown – at least to mainstream audiences – the first part of this new film is the most interesting. Dramatising Mary's everyday life before she met Christ, this version of the story shows her as an excitingly modern and independent woman. Here, Mary did not leave her home simply to follow Christ, but also because she refused to marry a husband chosen for her by her family. Yet the film's feminist theme is muddled by a disappointing insistence on reassuring the viewer that, against popular belief, Mary was not in fact a prostitute – on-screen text bookending the film explains that this misconception originates from the 6th century. As laudable as correcting a 15 hundred year old mistake from a mostly fictional text might be, it cannot compensate for the harm done in further perpetuating the demonisation of sex work.

The film's progressive capital and its more innovative aspects are further depleted when the focus inevitably shifts to Christ himself. This might not be a fault of the script at all: as the film struggles to recentre on Mary, it is hard not to suspect there simply might not be that much to be said about her.

Yet Rooney Mara in the title role manages to hold our attention even when the film focuses on the preacher, her performance outshining that of Joaquin Phoenix as the Son of God. Her intense gaze and the strong sense of intelligence emanating from her imbue her character with a presence that Phoenix's oddly cliched and uninspired interpretation lacks completely.

Amid the mild torpor, there is some fun to be had in spotting popular actors from various corners of world cinema mingling among the cast, presumably making the film easier to market outside of the US but also helping it avoid accusations of whitewashing. A highlight is Tahar Rahim, here playing a rather different 'Prophet' in the role of Judas. He makes the most of a character whose confused intentions again seem the result of an ill-conceived attempt to put a modern spin on his ultimate betrayal.

Mara thankfully recaptures the spotlight towards the film's end. But by this point it has already become clear that, although a rather elegant and serene interpretation of an eternal story, this film has little new or interesting to offer either to believers or non-believers.

**ELENA LAZIC**

# Western

*Directed by*
**VALESKA GRISEBACH**
*Starring*
**MEINHARD NEUMANN**
**REINHARDT WETREK**
**SYULEYMAN ALILOV LETIFOV**
*Released*
**10 JULY**

**3**

**ANTICIPATION.**
*Independent German cinema is on a roll and the tropes of the western are always fascinating.*

**4**

**ENJOYMENT.**
*Boasts a vibrant realism and a humanism that translate into a delicate miracle.*

**5**

**IN RETROSPECT.**
*Packed with moments of beauty worthy of classic westerns, and makes you want to be more attentive towards others.*

Don't let that title mislead you: Valeska Grisebach's third feature is much more than another attempt to modernise that most American of all cinematic traditions. With an honest simplicity this unassuming yet striking film uses the conventions of the genre to tell a Euro-specific story, revealing in the process the eternal power of these formal motifs. Meinhard (Meinhard Neumann) is a middle-aged construction worker who arrives in the Bulgarian countryside with a team of fellow Germans to alter the landscape. While his colleagues are unashamedly vocal about their disdain for the country they're visiting, Meinhard doesn't share their macho patriotism, which Grisebach makes clear through easy, precise framing and editing. A solitary man of the valley, he prefers to observe the natural surroundings with a discreet curiosity. Soon enough, he finds himself mingling with the locals.

The language barrier proves challenging, but it's also a blessing for this quiet man. Neumann, in his screen debut, responds perfectly to the unintelligible words and evocative behaviour of those around him. John Wayne built a career on his ability to say more with powerful stances than words, and in the same way Meinhard relies on body language to make himself understood. He finds a childlike pleasure in this more primitive level of communication, where connections between different people seem to materialise organically. When Adrian (Syuleyman Alilov Letifov), a beloved local, offers him a ride one night, Meinhard sees a kindred spirt. Soon, they take on late night construction jobs together, and language becomes less relevant to their friendship.

Yet Grisebach is well aware that what caused conflict between American pilgrims and natives wasn't language but the desire to own the land. For 21st century Europe, this colonialism is blurrier as borders and economic exchanges are more vague and complex. Grisebach served as script consultant on the 2016's *Toni Erdmann*, which, like *Western*, questions the benefits of German investments for smaller Eastern European countries. Her own film, however, does so by employing the very concrete route of natural physical elements. Water is the main bone of contention, and the literal cause of conflict. The pristine Bulgarian countryside is tinged with melancholy as the workers start altering the course of the river, just as the virgin soil of classic westerns appears full of broken promises today since modernisation eventually killed off the cowboy way and the American Dream seems like nothing more than that – a dream. A beautiful white horse is also treated like a natural exchange object. Meinhard uses it to better connect with the locals to whom it belongs, but his hateful colleague Vincent (Reinhardt Wetrek) takes it away and disturbs the peace.

A horseless cowboy, neither at home with his compatriots nor fully accepted by the Bulgarian people he loves, Meinhard might be yet another good hearted drifter, belonging nowhere and everywhere at once. The uplifting sensation one gets from witnessing two people understanding and appreciating each other without words, however, remains stronger than the disappointment of irreconcilable differences. In a world divided by economic interests, just the possibility of a more human connection is possible is a precious kind of hope. **MANUELA LAZIC**

*Interview by* **DAVID JENKINS** *Illustration by* **MONICA BARENGO**

# Valeska Grisebach

## *Western* is a sensual, rustic drama which pays subtle homage to the classic horse opera, explains its German-born maker.

The wait for Valeska Grisebach's third feature has been well worth it. The film is entirely unique and confident interpretation of what we might define as a classical movie western. She casts newcomer Meinhard Neumann as an enigmatic construction worker who heads to Bulgaria for a job, only to be trapped in the middle of a war of attrition between the brash ex-pats and suspicious locals.

**LWLies: You made *Longing* in 2008 and there was this feeling of discovering a great new director. Then you went away for 10 years. What happened?** Grisebach: It was a mix of things: I had a child; I became a mother at 40 and I really wanted to spend some time with my daughter. The other reason is that I was teaching. I was giving advice for other projects. But also, to be honest, I really spent a long time thinking about this project. I think quite early on I decided that I wanted to do something on my fascination with the western genre. But then I was thinking and researching. It wasn't so easy.

**Do you enjoy the research stage?** I love research. I can do it for ages. For me it is the most beautiful part of filmmaking. In the end, it wasn't easy to write. I wanted to have a narrative, but I also wanted to hide it. I wanted to make all these links and associations with other movies. And then we had to postpone for a year because there was some money missing. The life between the films is very nice. It's a time to not think about film.

**Is research for you sitting alone in a library, or going out on the streets and talking to people?** I read a lot of books. But for me it's to go outside and confront an idea. I want to take a question and connect it with reality. In the beginning, I wanted to talk to people, mainly men, about their "western" moments in life. I went onto the street and was looking for men that I could imagine on a horse in a western. Very soon, I ended up moving towards construction workers. They have tools on their belt, and they wear work clothes and have this certain surly attitude. I asked them if I could invite them for a casting and an interview. It's a beautiful moment, and a lot of people say, 'Yes, why not!' In this situation, these men were hesitant, but as soon as I said I wanted to make a western, they agreed.

**When you said it was going to be a western, how did they react?** I told them it would be a contemporary western, and maybe only one that I knew secretly. It was a joke. I said that we wouldn't be travelling back in time and there would be no need to act like a cowboy would act.

**How early in the process did you know you wanted to give the film this elemental title?** For me, it was the title from the beginning. It was my working title. It was a sign. When the film was finished, I looked at it and thought it might have been too direct. In the end, I always come back to what I started with. It's interesting that you have this little sign at the beginning that you can connect to.

**When did your originally fall in love with the western?** I share this love with a whole generation. You associate this love with people in the States, or maybe in Italy. I was sitting in West Berlin, in front of the TV set, and watching a lot of westerns with my father. For me it was a very touching and exciting genre. Later I realised how much I felt attracted to that setting and those solitary male heroes. A friend of mine, who is also a director, told me that when she was a girl she identified with the male heroes of the westerns, but at the same time she was falling in love.

It's a universal romantic seam of the westerns – searching for moments of freedom and independence. Or maybe the idea of coming home from life on the borders of society or in the wilderness. It's a romantic seam, of people searching for a personal destiny. I became interested in the later westerns were they discuss this idea of constructing a modern society. The genre deals with ambivalence – the question of how much someone wants to be part of a society.

**But also nationalism and colonialism.** Yes. Later on, when I was thinking about westerns, I realised I wanted to deal with this xenophobia. I live in Germany which has this special, terrible history. I did lots of interviews with people for research, and in families there's another oral history which is different to the official German history. Sometimes you can hear things between the lines. In Germany, if you do something about nationalism or xenophobia, there is almost a genre for this. When I thought of this idea of German construction workers in another country, I could have both levels. They're strangers who have to deal with desire and mistrust.

**But also nationalism and colonialism.** When I told Meinhardt about the role, I said that it's like he's in a Walt Disney world – a fantasy place where he can totally reinvent himself. He can take all these emotions from the people who live there. But there's a moment where it breaks and they feel a bit of his weakness. It was clear that the film had to end at the moment he has to deal with his shame

# The Third Murder

*Directed by*
**HIROKAZU KOREEDA**
*Starring*
**MASAHARU FUKUYAMA**
**KÔJI YAKUSHO**
**SHINNOSUKE MITSUSHIMA**
*Released*
**23 MARCH**

**5**

**ANTICIPATION.**
*One of the world's great directors tries his hand at a murder story.*

**4**

**ENJOYMENT.**
*It's about patience rather than pleasure: this is chilly, bleak and contemplative.*

**4**

**IN RETROSPECT.**
*There's plenty to chew on as Koreeda picks apart ideas of morality, law and justice.*

In his more recent work, writer/director Hirokazu Kore-eda, the reigning genius of Japanese observational cinema, has come down with a serious case of the warm and fuzzies. In 2011's *I Wish*, a pair of plucky, adorable youngsters run away from home to see the bullet train; in 2015's *Our Little Sister*, three women find themselves caring for their plucky, adorable sibling. Even his last film, the comparatively downbeat post-marital drama *After the Storm*, keeps the plucky, adorable child of divorce firmly in the centre of the frame. None of which is remotely intended as criticism: Koreeda deals with childhood more convincingly than any director this side of Shane Meadows, and *I Wish* is one of the most emotionally intelligent and intensely moving films of the past decade.

But perhaps it was time for a change. As the title implies, *The Third Murder* is a very different proposition, a self-conscious, rigorously controlled left-turn into a world of rough justice, amoral legality and tragic self-sacrifice. Shot in shades of china white and cloudy grey and backed by a chiming, insistent piano score, this is about as warm and fuzzy as a snapped icicle. It begins with that eponymous homicide, as ageing ex-con Misumi (Kôji Yakusho) whacks his boss repeatedly over the head with a monkey wrench and sets fire to the corpse. His requested lawyer Shigemori (Masaharu Fukuyama, from Kore-eda's own *Like Father, Like Son*) turns out to be the son of the judge who put Misumi away for 30 years for the murder of two loan sharks. But he's determined not to let history affect his judgement, committing himself to getting a fair trial for his client. Though perhaps 'fair' isn't the correct word: Shigemori is one of those lawyers who'll do anything – including ignoring vital evidence – if he can ensure that this self-confessed three-time killer escapes the death penalty.

He sets about his work with a detective's zeal, digging deep into Misumi's past. But Shigemori soon learns that nothing about this case is straightforward: why was Misumi exchanging emails with his victim's seemingly distraught wife (Yuki Saito), and why is their teenage daughter Sakei (Suzu Hirose, the title character in *Our Little Sister*) hanging around the crime scene? Why does the murderer keep changing his story, omitting or perhaps forgetting key details of the crime? The result is a focused, painstaking and quietly angry autopsy of the Japanese legal system, setting up a series of ethical quandaries then picking them apart with clinical precision. Is true justice possible when both the prosecution and the defence are only in it to win? In a corrupt society, might an apparently immoral act – even murder – be morally justifiable? And are some lives just not worth living?

Not every element of Koreeda's forensically constructed script fits together, and one twist in particular feels poorly developed and only marginally convincing. But the performances are pin-sharp – Fukuyama is especially impressive as the cynical attorney who secretly longs to believe – and the photography is subtly effective, offering striking new angles on the creaky old through-the-glass prison interview setup. *The Third Murder* may not send audiences out into the night with a spring in their step, but you'll be turning it over in your head for weeks.

**TOM HUDDLESTON**

# Mansfield 66/67

*Directed by*
**P DAVID EBERSOLE**
**TODD HUGHES**
*Released*
**13 APRIL**

**4**

**ANTICIPATION.**
*Jayne Mansfield and Satanism... what a combo!*

**3**

**ENJOYMENT.**
*Some corny flourishes but the archival footage is fabulous.*

**3**

**IN RETROSPECT.**
*A fun if slight look at one of the greatest stars of the 1950s.*

This film opens with a disclaimer: 'A true story based on rumor and hearsay.' Briskly paced and cheeky, it offers a fun primer on a curious bit of Hollywood history, though some audiences may be left wanting. It details the final years of actress Jayne Mansfield and her relationship with Anton LaVey, the founder of the Church of Satan. While the famous photographs of LaVey and Mansfield together are indeed delightful, the film seeks to draw too much meaning from what was essentially a chance photo op, as it suggests the two eccentric figures may have had an affair and LaVey may have had some premonition of Mansfield's untimely death in a car crash. Whether any of these theories carry weight is up for debate, but the mere idea of Mansfield's alluringly over-the-top femininity combined with Satanism certainly makes for a juicy documentary pitch.

LaVey and Mansfield are both individually fascinating, and one senses that each could merit his or her own more in-depth documentary. The strength of this film lies in its shrewd use of archival footage. There's a treasure trove of clips containing Mansfield, from films, TV appearances and interviews, and some of the clips are spliced in to act as a kind of pithy commentary. The selection of talking heads is also strong, with the always great John Waters giving Mansfield the highest compliment, calling her a "dumb genius blonde." Early on, contextualising Mansfield's career as a blonde bombshell too often dismissed as a poor man's Marilyn Monroe, there's a supercut of the many breathy, near-orgasmic sounds she emitted throughout her filmography. They must be heard to be believed – truly, Mansfield carried herself like a cartoon character made flesh, and for this she should be celebrated, not shrugged off.

Mansfield embodied cheesecake '50s sexuality, and the documentary explores some of the difficulties inherent in the actress' uneasy transition into the '60s with its more liberated take on gender. To its credit, the film doesn't set up Mansfield as a punch line, or give her the melodramatic *E! True Hollywood Story* treatment. The scholars and directors interviewed here speak of a certain savviness with regard to her image, and various clips show Mansfield speaking multiple languages, playing violin and espousing liberal philosophies in her charming voice.

Mansfield is ripe for a feminist reclamation, with her potent combination of talent and beauty, and her kitsch status which merits a closer look. *Mansfield 66/67* is a bit too winking at times, with its use of exaggerated reenactments and blonde-wigged dancers in interstitial sequences. Such moments don't add much – when you have such great source material as Mansfield, you don't exactly need more pop elements on top. Those going into the film without much knowledge of the actress are likely to want to delve into her filmography. It feels slight at times, but does at least present the actress as a compelling woman both completely of her time and cannily ahead of it. As the bombshell herself says in an old interview, "If you can't laugh at yourself, you may as well give up." Excellent advice, made all the more potent by who's giving it.

**ABBEY BENDER**

# Custody

*Directed by*
**XAVIER LEGRAND**
*Starring*
**LÉA DRUCKER**
**DENIS MÉNOCHET**
**THOMAS GIORIA**
*Released*
**23 MARCH**

**3**

**ANTICIPATION.**
*A Venice prizewinner and a first feature. Intriguing...*

**3**

**ENJOYMENT.**
*A film of two halves – both good, but don't feel like they fit together.*

**3**

**IN RETROSPECT.**
*An accomplished debut, with chilling performances from the two leads.*

This poisonous little debut feature from French director Xavier Legrand is a long-fanged genre piece kitted out in sheep's clothing. Its opening act offers a fan dance of subtle misdirection and teasing obfuscation, as a warring couple engage in a bitter custody battle overseen by a harried magistrate. In the red corner, there's Léa Drucker's cowering fawn Miriam, who wants nothing more than to be rid of her allegedly vile and overbearing husband. Unfortunately for her, she doesn't quite have the courage to just say these words in a room full of lawyers. In the blue corner, there's seething man-hulk Antoine (Denis Ménochet), who resembles a melancholic, gone-to-seed prizefighter. His tiny, piercing eyes and petit facial features serve to cloak any outward emotion, making it even tougher, initially, to know whose side to take.

Despite statements from his children that they no longer want to spend time with him and various accusations of abuse, Antoine calls conspiracy and claims that Miriam is a master manipulator who has turned his brood against him. Even though the case seems to be weighted heavily in Miriam's favour, the judge inexplicably awards a grateful Antoine weekend visiting rights. As that extended prologue comes to an abrupt, almost business-like close, everything is laid bare.

*Custody* is a direct sequel to Legrand's 2013 short, *Just Before Losing Everything*, which charts Miriam's initial attempts to break free from her quasi-psychotic spouse. While there's some initial ambiguity in a film about which parent we should be rooting for as as objective observers, the ball drops fairly swiftly when it's revealed that Antoine is, in fact, an obsessive psychopath of the Jack Torrence variety, and sundry carnage ensues. Any sense that the film is interested in dealing with the emotional shades of grey that come from domestic disputes is tossed aside for some nicely executed stalk-and-slash business as Antoine loses his shit in a very public way.

Where the film delivers on the thrills front, it doesn't appear to offer much insight into the untangling of a relationship or how children's lives are negitively affected by the actions of a hostile parent. Where Legrand excels is in the way he deals with space and the physical distance between characters. Just as in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, where you always have a sense of the protagonists' presence, both on and off screen, the same goes here when Antoine begins chasing his terrified young son across a housing estate before backing down and retreating to his car. As you witness the extent of Antoine's mania, it become harder to believe that a judge would have originally allowed him even limited access to children, but maybe that's the point. Humans – not just extremely violent men – can pull down a cloaking device which hides their inner rage, and no judge in the land can see through it at the vital moment. This is an impressive first film, and it will be interesting to see if Legrand's path takes him towards more cut-and-dried horror, or the chin-strokey, cynical social realist art movie at which directors like Michael Haneke excel. **DAVID JENKINS**

YAKUSHO KÔJI

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THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

"BEAUTIFULLY ACTED + TREMBLES WITH TRUTH"
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★★★★

"A CAPTIVATING PUZZLE"
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LITTLE WHITE LIES

"A DOSE OF PROFOUND HUMANISM"
SCREEN DAILY

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# Have a Nice Day

*Directed by*
**LUI JIAN**
*Starring*
**CAO KOU,**
**MA XIAOFENG**
**ANG SIMING**
*Released*
**23 MARCH**

**3**

**ANTICIPATION.**
*Chinese independent animation doesn't come around the block too often.*

**4**

**ENJOYMENT.**
*A conventional tale of bungled crime given a fresh lick of primary-coloured paint.*

**4**

**IN RETROSPECT.**
*Very funny indeed.*

Hair seems to be a big deal in the world of digital animation. Water too. Both stand as kind of final boss level for this rapidly-evolving visual form. The 2010 Disney film *Tangled* felt like a showpiece for immaculate individual hair strand rendering and 2013's *Frozen* did the same for water and ice. But once you've perfected flowing locks and the mellifluous motion of liquid, then what next? Liu Jian's *Have a Nice Day* proves that, in animation, the way forward might just be less rather than more. Not so much a move away from photorealism, but a chance to take stock at what makes the animated mode of communication unique.

This deadpan noir roundelay does away with the detail that doesn't matter – the skin, the texture, the goddamned hair follicles – and is militantly selective about, per Martin Scorsese's dictum, what is in and what is out of the frame. It's an impressionistic idea of what a place should look like, and the smoothed-over, guerilla-style animation technique offers a perfect mirror of the story's down-and-out milieu. For instance, there's a scene set inside a Chinese night owl internet cafe, and Jian carefully transmits an atmosphere of lackadaisical seediness through his careful visualisations. Chipped blank walls are adorned with crappy posters overlooking comiclly basic computer terminals. The sales assistant is overcome by after-hours torpor. It's rare to see stark minimalism used in such a way, as a large blocks of solid colour don't usually scan in animation. Not so here, as Jian is like a master production designer who curates detail as a way to help the viewer intuit the bigger picture.

*Have a Nice Day* revolves around two-bit hood Xiao, who, with earnestness to burn, decides to violently rob a stash of money from his own boss and then channel the proceeds into a trip to South Korea for plastic surgery. Not for him, mind, but his unseen girlfriend who won't leave her apartment because of a botched facelift. It swiftly transpires that Xiao is not a clever man, and he leaves a neon-glowing paper trail behind him, leading to said internet cafe. Thankfully for him, the gangsters sent out to retrieve the money aren't much brighter, and this apparently basic action becomes more contrived and absurd with each new twist.

Characters pile up, as do the misunderstandings. Violence is meted out often in confusion rather than for a refined purpose, and the film and events conspire to leave Xiao breathing (albeit barely) as the corpses pile up in his wake. The film's dune-dry sense of humour and intense longueurs – mostly the result of stupefaction rather than characters possessing any sense of drama – recall Jim Jarmusch's early years in which fly-blown slackers sit around waiting for their lives to begin. Made independently in China and subject to the country's stringent censorship restrictions, *Have a Nice Day*'s comically bleak depiction of its dead-end landscape is the only element you might chalk up as local critique. Its central thesis – that romance is dead and so are we all – feels pretty universal, all told. **DAVID JENKINS**

*Interview by* **MICHAEL LEADER** *Illustration by* **MONICA BARENGO**

# Lui Jian

## *Have a Nice Day* announces the Chinese animator as a brave new voice on the circuit.

Some films are radical by design, some are made radical by circumstance. Liu Jian's freeform neo-noir *Have a Nice Day* is both. The first Chinese animated feature to screen in competition at the Berlin Film Festival, *Have a Nice Day* garnered favourable reviews back in early 2017. Further festival dates followed at the Holland Animation Film Festival and Animafest Zagreb, but it was after a spotlight selection by Annecy, one of the most prestigious entries in the animation industry's calendar, that fate struck. The invitation was blocked by the Chinese authorities, who denied the film an exit visa for the festival, giving Jian and his work instant notoriety, and sharpening the social commentary that runs right through the film.

Reminiscent of early Tarantino in its dark humour and roving point of view, *Have a Nice Day* spins a spider-diagram narrative structure around a single crime: a young delivery driver steals a sizeable sum of money from his boss, in order to pay for a procedure that will fix his girlfriend's botched plastic surgery. However, the news travels fast, and over the course of one night in an unnamed Southern Chinese city, a procession of crooks, kooks and assorted ne'er-do-wells strike out in search of the stolen fortune. But what will they do if they get the money? The film's outlook is wry and satirical, depicting a society saturated by greed and consumerism, where dreams of freedom are almost entirely fixed within a circumscribed framework of bougie extravagance, capital and spending power.

**LWLies: What inspired you to make films?** Jian: I wanted a way to express my thoughts and feelings. I've already created novels, paintings, contemporary art and other art forms and haven't found them enough to express all I want, so I chose to make films.

**What films and filmmakers inspire you, both in your formative years and today?** In general, I mostly watch action movies. My motivation to create films is personal, but watching colleagues' films can also be touching. Clint Eastwood, the Coen brothers and Takashi Miike are some of my favourite directors. Satoshi Kon and Mamoru Oshii are also very good.

**How does your background in painting inform your animation style?** As I used animation to make the film, I used some of the skills I learned while studying Chinese painting. The process of learning how to paint enabled me to establish my main artistic concepts and to master the skill of artistic creation. Art is interwoven. An artist's style is determined by all his artistic accomplishments and life experiences, so the films and other art forms that I make definitely have a continuous style and theme.

**You perform many roles behind the scenes in this film – including director, background artist, editor and key animator. What are the benefits and challenges of being so hands-on as a director?** The benefit is that I can 100 per cent control the film's style; every line and every ray of light is how I want it, it's like the brushstrokes of a painting. The challenge is the long hours and the large workload.

**Speaking of those long hours, feature-length animation projects often take many years to complete, yet *Have a Nice Day* is filled with very recent cultural references, such as Donald Trump and Brexit. Was keeping the frame of reference current an important aspect of the film for you?** I wanted this film to have a strong contemporary feel, so when I started making it, I left blanks at some points to fill them with current events before the film was finally completed.

**One of the key themes of *Have a Nice Day* is the nature of freedom, as discussed by the characters as well as the lyrics of songs on the soundtrack. What does freedom mean to you, as a filmmaker?** Above all, freedom means being able to do what you want with your film. More importantly, it's choosing to live how you want.

**What do you love about movies?** The freedom and abundance of them

*Words by* NICK PINKERTON

# Momatoro's Divine Sea Warriors

**Japan's first ever animated feature saw a platoon of cuddly woodland critters take up arms against foreign invaders.**

World War Two was fought with everything on hand – fleets and tanks and bayonets and kamikaze Zeros, yes, but cartoons, too, dedicated to winning the hearts and minds of the coming generation to whatever Great Struggle was being proposed. In *Daffy the Commando*, for instance, the famous Warner Bros duck drops into Deutschland to doink a rotoscoped, Mel Blanc-voiced Hitler over the noggin with a mallet, while Popeye the Sailor can be seen sending an entire Japanese battleship to the salvage yard singlehanded in *You're a Sap, Mr Jap*. Even 'toons lacking in explicitly political content could send a message: Yasujiro Ozu, stationed in Singapore and screening contraband prints of captured Hollywood movies while in the employ of the censorship board, was gobsmacked by his first viewing of a certain 1940 Walt Disney production. "Watching *Fantasia* made me suspect that we were going to lose the war," he said. "Those guys look like trouble, I thought."

What the Japanese had, by way of belated response, was Mitsuyo Seo's black-and-white animated musical *Momotarō: Umi no Shinpei*, or *Momotaro's Divine Sea Warriors*, released by Shochiku in March of 1945. Unlike the Americans, who were quick to recruit their cartoon superstars and ink-stained Disney draftsmen to the cause, or the Germans, whose Ministry of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment was a veritable factory churning out caricatured Eternal Jews and rubicund British Bankers, the Japanese had come somewhat late to the art of propagandistic cartooning, though they tackled the job with characteristic aplomb.

There are some early exceptions, among them *Omochabako series dai san wa: Ehon senkya-hyakusanja-rokunen* (*Toybox Series 3: Picture Book*, 1936), in which Japan's shores must be defended from assault by characters bearing a striking resemblance to American icons Felix the Cat and Mickey Mouse. *Momotaro's Divine Sea Warriors*, however, was an undertaking on a scale unlike anything attempted before. It is credited as the country's first feature-length animation, its creation kick-started after *Fantasia*, that American super-weapon, had been screened for Seo by the Japanese Naval Ministry. The film that he was subsequently inspired to create was a combination of martial malarkey and the creepily cloying, makes a rather inauspicious beginning to what would become a storied history – as the Yanks rushed towards field testing the A-bomb, the Japanese were inventing anime.

If any American censors happened to see a copy of *Momotaro* at some late date in the War, it is unlikely that the encounter would have inspired serious doubts about the conflict's eventual outcome, though it may have raised a few questions about the composition of the Japanese fighting force. The film, a sort-of sequel to Seo's 37-minute 1943 production *Momotarō no Umiwashi* (*Momotaro's Sea Eagles,* 1943), depicts the travails of a naval unit comprised of various anthropomorphised animals – though, somewhat complicating matters, these animals serve alongside actual humans, and the film is further populated by other animals lacking pronounced human characteristics such as a propensity for wearing uniforms. As it begins, a band of four critters – a puppy, a pheasant, a bear cub, and a monkey, Harakichu – pass through bucolic fields under a sky alive with twittering skylarks, singing merrily as they go. They are en route to their native village, there to say their goodbyes before heading to the front. As they are being feted by the local yokels, however, drama ensues when Harakichu's baby brother, Santa, tumbles into a rushing stream, only saved by the drill-sharpened instincts of Harakichu and company.

From here the action moves to a Pacific island airbase for the Eastern Allied Sea Forces, being constructed with the enthusiastic support of jungle beasts, who raise their voice in jubilant song to celebrate the joys of working day and night in common cause and having "the power of Japan" burning in one's little heart. The newly cleared runway provides a landing for a plane carrying the Japanese general, the Momotaro of the title, an extraterrestrial figure of folklore who came to earth inside a giant peach, which gives him the name usually translated in English as "Peach Boy." Peach Boy and his soldiers take time to teach the jungle beasts the alphabet in a lengthy song-and-dance number, but there are forces beyond the powers of civilising that must still be dealt with, and an attack is prepared. Peach Boy is clearly the man for the job, inspiring loyalty and awe in all around him, this in spite of the fact that he bears a striking resemblance to the fiberglass mascot of the Big Boy restaurant chain.

The animation is a combination of the sophisticated, the makeshift, and the bizarre – the vacuous expression of Harakichu, for instance, or the odd, rhythmic flap of the ribbons that decorate the back of the sailor's caps, a motion originating from no identifiable source. There is a dynamic sense of perspectival play at work throughout, and woven into the narrative of

imperial might there are some charming, observant bits of business, like the image of a sky thick with lazily falling seedlings that anticipates a later mass paratrooper drop, or the exquisite attention to the plash and roll of raindrops on a bomber's windshield.

The occasional poetic or pastoral passage aside, however, the movie is unmistakably a propaganda effort. Its identifiable high point, at least in terms of pictoral invention, is a digressive history lesson in which Peach Boy warns against the duplicity of the white man through the illustrative example of the fate that befell, "the most beautiful island in the world," once ruled over by the wise and gentle king, Goa. The story of a ruler forced to cede control to foreign intercessors in lace collars echoes that of Celebes, in present-day Indonesia, whose ruler Sultan Hasanuddin was in 1665 forced to bend at the knee by Admiral Speelman of the Dutch East India Company, the territory remaining in Dutch hands until the dubious liberation of Japanese occupation. The prelapsarian island is depicted as a peacock-populated fantasia of ornate Islamicist architecture, the drama of its conquest played out entirely in silhouette – shadowy sailors climbing the rigging of a sinister galleon, conquistadors solemnly swaggering along the arcades of the royal palaces – that recalls Wayang, the Indonesian shadow puppet theater.

When at last the whites are seen in plain light, crumbling under the Peach Boy-led assault, they are not a pleasant sight, seen to be oafish, grotesque *oni* (ogres). As the dust of battle clears, a stern, steadfast, implacable Peach Boy browbeats a trio of stammering, simpering and dissembling Anglo officers into agreeing to an unconditional surrender. The bumptious self-confidence reflected in this scene was not widely shared in private by the Japanese high command. As early as 14 January, 1945, ex-prime minister Konoe Fumimaro had written to the emperor that, "Regrettably, defeat in the War has already become inevitable," though it was to press on regardless. This was about seven months before Hiroshima was levelled by an atomic bomb, and less than three before the last major military engagement of World War Two, the Battle of Okinawa, in which many of the obscene civilian casualty count were accountable to acts of shudan jiketsu, the mutual murder of close relatives, as children killed parents and parents killed children in order to avoid being taken alive by the Americans, whose purported take-no-prisoners savagery had been greatly exaggerated by Imperial propaganda. The fighting had already been underway for more than a month when *Momotaro's Divine Sea Warriors* was released – a final, decisive Japanese victory, shone out on cinema screens in Tokyo, Hiroshima, Nagasaki

Momotaro's Divine Sea Warriors *is released on Blu-ray in a new restoration on 26 March.*

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## The Age of Innocence

*Directed by*
**MARTIN SCORSESE**

*Starring*
**DANIEL DAY-LEWIS**
**MICHELLE PFEIFFER**
**WINONA RYDER**

**1993**

*Released* **19 MARCH**

*Blu-ray*

There is so much stifled yearning contained within Martin Scorsese's rhapsodic adaptation of Edith Wharton's 1920 novel that the celluloid positively shivers. Its screenplay, penned by the director's regular creative wingman, Jay Cocks, is a model of careful adaptation, in that it laches onto the rich thematic essence of the story rather than attempting to forcibly extract a simple, easy-on-the-eye storyline. The drama is made up almost entirely of one-to-one interaction in which the plans of two people are often then altered or subverted by the interventions of a third. At the centre is Daniel Day-Lewis' over-sensitive lawyer Newland Archer and 'fallen' countess Ellen Olenska (Michelle Pfeiffer), returned to New York circa 1870 having been scandalised by her Polish aristo husband.

Archer is engaged to beaming buttercup May Welland (Winona Ryder), but spends an unholy amount of his leisure time attempting to grant Olenska a safe return into the back-biting jackal pit that is East Coast high society. All three want something which they know they can't have, and end up having to settle for a tainted version of romantic contentment. And all this to preserve the protocols of the Gilded Age. While the director's most beloved work involves extremely violent men, this 1993 stunner may end up as his most fully realised, impassioned and delicate piece of work. While Day-Lewis brings a tamped-down frailty to Archer's lusty rogue, and Ryder hides oceans of untapped sadness under a dainty smile, it's Pfeiffer who steals the show: her turn as a woman who constantly and violently falls on her sword for the benefit of others is often painful to observe, and tragic in the most logical, unmelodramatic sense imaginable. **DAVID JENKINS**

## Gumshoe

*Directed by*
**STEPHEN FREARS**

*Starring*
**ALBERT FINNEY**
**BILLIE WHITELAW**
**FRANK FINLAY**

**1971**

*Released* **19 MARCH**

*Blu-ray*

Did you know that, way, way back in an era all-but forgotten by mankind (the 1970s) director Stephen Frears used to make fantastic movies? None of this featherlight costume drama prestige nonsense he's associated with now – proper, innovative, original, weird movies. How great would it be if he were able to channel the spirit of his 1971 debut feature, *Gumshoe*, once more and offer a humorous colloquial take on classic era noir? The film poses the intriguing question: what if small-time gangsters were kidnapped from from 1930s America and rehoused in modern day working class Liverpool? Albert Finney ladles on the charm like watery gravy as Eddie Ginley, a Chandler-loving bingo caller and aspirant stand-up comedian who decides to branch out as an after hours private detective.

His first case is a humdinger, a dirty bit of housecleaning which loops right back to shady diplomatic relations with Russia, gun-running in Africa, heroin trafficking, a punch-up in an antiquarian bookshop and a nasty case of sibling rivalry. It feels like *The Maltese Falcon* cross-processed with *Coronation Street,* in the best possible way, and Finney smoothly alternates between thick Scouse drawl and smart-aleky hardboiled patter. The meticulously structured, slow-release script by Neville Smith offers a succession of obscure episodes which only take on meaning as the saga unfolds. The moment which epitomises the ironic culture-clash at the film's core is when Eddie decides to stash a gun, a photograph and a wad of bank notes in a box of frozen plaice fillets in the top of his freezer. Yet these bleak shots of humour do little to undercut a sense of sincere drama, exemplified by Eddie's tempestuous relationship with his femme fatale sister-in-law, played by Billie Whitelaw. **DAVID JENKINS**

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## Silence and Cry

| | |
|---|---|
| *Directed by*<br>**MIKLÓS JANCSÓ** | **1968** |
| *Starring*<br>**MARI TÖRÖCSIK**<br>**JÓZSEF MADARAS**<br>**ZOLTÁN LATINOVITS** | **OUT NOW** |
| | *Blu-ray* |

The question that hangs over this and many of the other early films by the late Hungarian director Miklós Janscó is: should I bone up on my modern eastern European military history before or after watching? Do these films stand as recreations of key episodes in one country's tumultuous and violent past? Or are they more poetic and universal, standing in as broader investigations into the tyranny of man during times of war? *Silence and Cry* from 1968 arrived soon after the director's most well-loved works: 1966's *The Round-up* and 1967's *The Red and the White*. In all three films Janscó takes advantage of his homeland's eerily flat terrain which is so vast, open and empty that it serves as a kind of open prison. As with those films, *Silence and Cry* explores the crooked power dynamics between fascistic soldiers and the crestfallen proletariat who are mocked and manipulated.

The obscure cat-and-mouse game here sees a vicious general ponder his actions having discovered a left wing dissident being sheltered in a remote village by a weak-willed farmer and two younger women. The story is shorn of drama and instead captures the crushing banality of the situation, as murder, corruption and torture play out in a hushed register. Where the actions are obtuse to the point of abstraction, the film's pleasures derive from the soft, gliding camera arcs and the pictorial formations and blocking methods used when placing figures within the frame. Janscó is a filmmaker who acknowledges that reality doesn't exist within a frame, however wide your vantage. People are restless, they walk and wander at will, and so do stories and so does history. So yes, do read up on your history before encountering this strange object, but don't feel like you have to remember the details while watching. **DAVID JENKINS**

## La Chinoise

| | |
|---|---|
| *Directed by*<br>**JEAN-LUC GODARD** | **1967** |
| *Starring*<br>**ANNE WIAZEMSKY**<br>**JEAN-PIERRE LÉAUD**<br>**JULIET BERTO** | *Released* **23 APRIL** |
| | *Blu-ray* |

A massively infuriating film, but joyfully so. Biting a thumb at construction-line, bourgeois filmmaking, Jean Luc-Godard passed through the red-tinted looking glass with 1967's splenetic collage *La Chinoise* into a cinema which assumed the form of visual sloganeering. A group of leftist radical dissidents hole up in a Parisian apartment and attempt to forge an ideologically pure form of political activism from behind barricades made from Mao's 'Little Red Book'. The first hour of the film takes the form of a revolutionary cabaret spectacular as the likes of Anne Wiazemsky, Jean-Pierre Léaud and Juliet Berto engage in arguments, readings, sing-songs and study. Most entertaining is the little theatrical sketches they produce which express their vocal hatred of American imperialism, particularly in relation to the Vietnam war.

Yet as much as the film acts as a mouthpiece for Godard's own leanings, it also works as a tragic satire of how easily young people are able to divorce morals and emotions from political action. Following a brief lull in the mid-section where petty internecine quarrels begin to drive the band a part, the film ascends to a spectacular high as the last 30 minutes narrows its focus onto Wiazemsky's character as she attempts to assassinate the Minister of Culture of the Soviet Union during a diplomatic visit to France. A long two-shot on a train sees her discussing the pros and cons of violent direct action (in order to expedite revolution) with the political philosopher Francis Jeanson. It's the film's most thoughtful and intense passage, as the two parry with complex ideas and try desperately to win this un-winnable argument. This new Blu-ray release arrives on shelves alongside a new box set of Godard's so-called Dziga Vertov films, made in collaboration with the French thinker Jean-Pierre Gorrin. **DAVID JENKINS**

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## Yi-Yi

*Directed by*
**EDWARD YANG**

*Starring*
**NIEN-JEN WU**
**ELAINE JIN**
**ISSEI OGATA**

**2000**

*Released* **5 MARCH**

*Blu-ray*

In his seminal 1878 novel 'Anna Karenina', Leo Tolstoy theorised "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." This principle becomes manifest in Edward Yang's *Yi-Yi*, an intimate portrait of a middle-class Taiwanese family in flux, which is lovingly presented in a new Criterion Collection edition. Set in Taipei over the course of a single year, the film opens with a wedding and closes with a funeral. The three-hour space in between these two bookend moments covers the vastness of the human experience, from the dizzy excitement of first love to the melancholy of watching a loved one slip away.

Three narratives within the Yian family are meticulously interwoven, as the patriarch NJ struggles to cope with his wife's desertion as she wrestles with a midlife crisis. Meanwhile his children – the teenage Ting-Ting and youngster Yang-Yang – struggle with an adolescent love triangle and school bullies respectively. The obstacles faced by the Yian family are remarkable in their mundanity, familiar to anyone who's been involved in a domestic dispute. The elder family members bicker among themselves while Ting-Ting and Yang-Yang navigate the difficulties of growing up. Yang-Yang, a child who struggles with the distant nature of his family, comes to understand the world through exploring it with a camera in his hand. The film looks glorious too, in part due to the new digital restoration – from the lush greens of roadside foliage to the backlit neon signs of a Taipei McDonalds, there's a dream-like quality to the visuals that underscores the sense of isolation within the family, which only lets up in the film's emotional ending. It's the elegant simplicity of *Yi-Yi* that makes it such a joy to watch – it's as authentic an examination of familial tensions as you're likely to find on film in recent memory. **HANNAH WOODHEAD**

## The Passenger

*Directed by*
**MICHELANGELO ANTONIONI**

*Starring*
**JACK NICHOLSON**
**MARIA SCHNEIDER**
**JENNY RUNACRE**

**1975**

*Released* **19 MARCH**

*Blu-ray*

There seems to be a modern formula when it comes to screen acting, especially when related to celebrity: make your millions through pop trash or the award circuit, then pick and chose work with a critically lauded maverick director in order to build a legacy. With *Chinatown*, *Five Easy Pieces* and *The Last Detail* under his belt, Jack Nicholson headed to Europe, with the help of MGM's coin, to make a movie with the marble-eyed godhead of screen alienation: Michelangelo Antonioni. The result is close to a perfect match between star and director, as Nicholson assumes a guise of intense placidity and internalised confusion to play David Locke, a depressive journalist tooling around in northern Africa with little to show for his toil. He returns to his dismal hotel to discover the man next door has died in his bed, and as they look superficially similar, he takes the opportunity to assume his identity and live in his shoes for a while, maybe even for the remainder of his days.

Despite the promise of adventure and a diary filled with exotic appointments, Locke soon realises that one life is as bad as any other, yet in order to extend his dangerous role play, he must allude the law and his ex-wife who have mounted a private investigation into his apparent demise. Maria Schneider joins him as a nameless help-meet who too seems unmoored from conventional happiness. The images by cinematographer Luciano Tovoli highlight architectural magnificence and natural grandeur, and in doing so almost mock the pair's persistent melancholy. It's maybe the closest the director ever came to making a genre film in his mature style, and it also boasts a climactic, matter-defying long take that would leave MC Escher scratching his head. A movie to kill your buzz but to also stir your soul. **DAVID JENKINS**

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# The 2018 Sundance Film Festival

The Sundance Film Festival used to be a snow globe-like bubble where filmmakers, fans and press could disappear and escape reality. Up in the mountains of Park City, there was a kind of immunity from the news, controversies or whatever else awaited us outside. For a few days in January, we could retreat into theatre spaces, queues and the nearest hotel lobby bar thinking of only the next screening or party.

Since its coincidental timing with last year's Women's March, Sundance has picked up a sharper political edge. After President Trump's inauguration, #OscarsSoWhite and the undoing of a once-lauded Sundance regular, Harvey Weinstein, this year's programming needed to react. It's a changed festival, one that now includes a slip of paper with every badge spelling out the organization's code of conduct.

That change was reflected in the festival screens around and outside Park City. Instead of opening the festival with something more "traditionally" Sundance, like last year's ultra-violent *I Don't Feel at Home in This World Anymor*e or the environmental documentary sequel to *An Inconvenient Truth*, programmers chose a boundary-pushing drama that directly addresses police violence and everyday brutality. In a star-making role, Daveed Diggs plays a black man days away from probation who witnesses a cop kill an unarmed black man. Despite their long and symbiotic friendship, his white best friend cannot understand the mental trauma Diggs' character has gone through. The rest of Carlos López Estrada's *Blindspotting* explores the complex racial dynamic between the two men and society.

Likewise, Boots Riley's surrealistic social comedy, *Sorry to Bother You*, smartly tackles the exploitation of black bodies, unbridled capitalism, racism and code-switching. Cassius (Lakeith Stanfield) is an unwitting pawn in his own story, manipulated to betray his friends for monetary gains and rewarded at work for sounding more like a white guy. The film deconstructs the layers of his betrayal while simultaneous poking fun at every institution in sight.

The festival has always had an eye for social issues, but something in this year's crop made the personal political again. Another opening night film was Lauren Greenfield's follow up to *The Queen of Versailles*, *Generation Wealth*. On the surface, the documentary resembles Kirsten Johnson's introspective look at her life's work, *Cameraperson*. However, Greenfield focuses her camera on more than just her experience. She uses this retrospective look at her career as a way to explore class, both her own and her subjects'.

This self-examination of our pasts allows us to trace our steps back from a certain point. It's something many of us in the entertainment industry have been doing in regards to sexism and racism. There were many films that explored this at Sundance as well, like the subjects of *Bisbee '17,* who work through the historical trauma of a mass deportation that banished their ancestors' friends, family members and neighbours to the desert. Laura Dern's character in *The Tale* is forced to confront memories of her sexual assault and how she's altered them to make sense to who she's become. In *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*, Chloë Grace Moretz's character revisits the moment when she is outed as a lesbian while suffering at a gay conversion camp.

Now that this year's festival is done, the parking lot tents are packed and the volunteers sent home, what will Sundance's programmers and organizers see? The potential to affect change in Hollywood has always been a goal of the festival, but that mission seems so much more urgent now. Even personal documentaries and indie pet projects stand for something more than themselves. Everything feels more important in this new reality. The snow globe is broken, and hopefully won't come back for some time

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SAE INSTITUTE

**LWLIES:**

What do you love about movies?

**WES ANDERSON:**

This is a clichéd kind of answer but... for me it has always been the thing of when you watch a movie that you love you can both disappear - you know the movie takes over and you don't have to do anything - and at the same time you can be the movie, you can see yourself as the character in the movie if you're drawn to the character in that way. So in two different ways it takes over and not so many media do that. Music can do that and lots of different artforms can do it. Movies do it. When they do it well, they do it forcefully. There's not exactly a snappy answer and I don't know if it's an answer at all but it's the best I've got.

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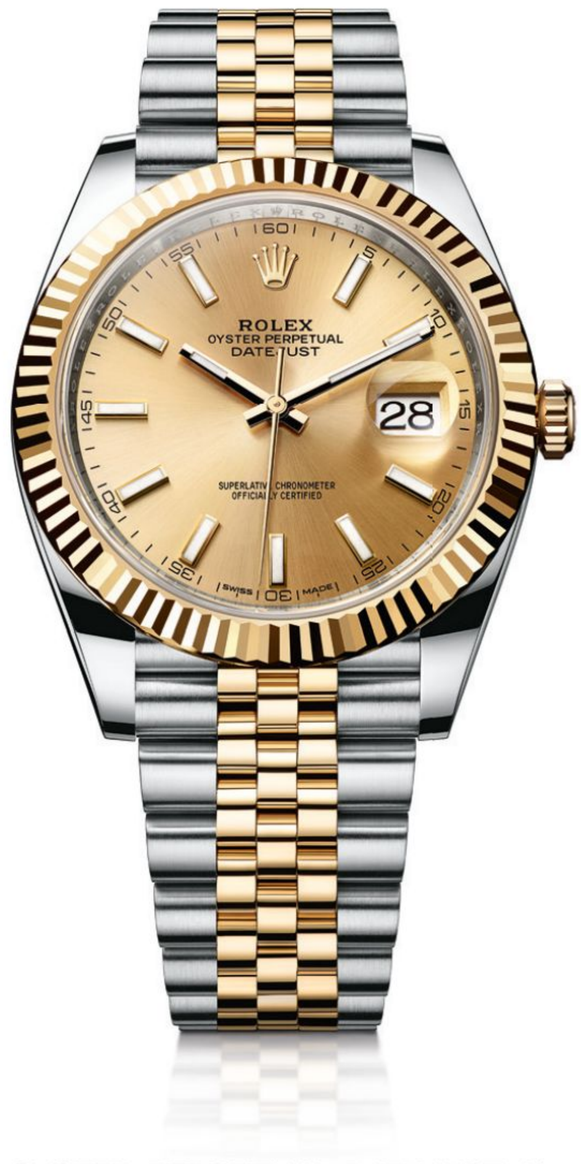


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